

Crossed Tongues: Reclaiming Black Antillean Female
Subjectivity within the Narratives of Maryse Condé

by

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“We are in language just as we are in body;
we feel it as we feel our hands and feet.”

-Jean-Paul Sartre
Qu'est-ce que la littérature?

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Introduction

Quelle magie ! Ces séries d'arabesques qui traduisaient une pensée, qui communiquaient un imaginaire, par elles plus lancinant que le réel. Écrire ! Mettre en mouvement ses reins, son sexe, son cœur pour accoucher du monde inscrit dans son obscurité. Dire qu'elle avait eu cette audace ! À Pointe-à-Pitre, le soir au galetas, quand la maison dormait, elle griffonnait sur des cahiers à spirale. Une force incontrôlable en elle. À qui montrer le fruit de ses veilles ?

What magic! These series of arabesques symbolized a thought, communicated an element of the imaginary, which through them, was more penetrating than reality. To write! To put her hips, her sex, her heart into motion in order to give birth to a world inscribed in her obscurity. To think that she'd had such audacity! In her garret in Point-à-Pitre, on evenings when the household slept, she used to scribble in spiral notebooks. An uncontrollable force within her. To whom could she show the fruit of those sleepless nights?

-Maryse Condé, Trois femmes à Manhattan

The act of writing has unfathomable potential. For the Black Antillean woman writer, the act of writing, of twisting her tongue into language, of imagining a stolen history, and remembering that stolen history into being has unfathomable potential because it extracts voice out of a space that has been systematically silenced by the

white Western world. Claude, the protagonist in Maryse Condé's nouvelle *Trois femmes à Manhattan* feels an "uncontrollable force" within her, a force that propels her to extend her own voice out into a world that has been devoted to keeping her silent. She writes for herself but the simple assertion of her voice, the specificity of her language, and the reality of the world to which her mother birthed her speak to a larger collective that like Claude, yearns to assert its voice.

Maryse Condé writes with this same "uncontrollable force." She articulates female subjectivity through her own unique use of language. Her narratives speak to an understanding of Antillean identity that is fluid like the Caribbean Sea. But the sea speaks to many origins. Condé does not root the Antillean subject in one place or one time. Her oeuvre embodies the oceanic flow that mimics the plurality and multiplicity of the Antillean reality.

This project engages two pieces written by Maryse Condé: her narrative *Le cœur à rire et à pleurer* and her short story *Trois femmes à Manhattan*. Situated within a broader discourse on established Antillean identity theory, this project seeks to demonstrate how Condé's narratives are themselves the embodiment of a new theory. This theory provides a lens through which the dialectic of gender as well as the contributions of the Black Antillean woman writer can finally be recognized. The work of Maryse Condé points to a new minority discourse, one that is not limited by previous theoretical assertions. Condé explores themes that center on migration, race, alienation, memory, collective history, individual experience, exile, and citizenship while subverting the Western literary canon.

Within the established discourse surrounding Antillean literature, it has been widely argued and agreed upon that questions regarding race, language, history, politics, citizenship, and cultural plurality are essential to the structure and thematic foundations of these works. Critics have noted the emergence of an Antillean literature that seeks to articulate new categories of relational and “postcolonial” identity. The emerging literature acknowledges migrating states of consciousness and knowledge within the Antillean imagination as well as the significance of a history marked by geographic displacement.

Postcolonial literary critics such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak have each argued, albeit in markedly different ways, that “the only possibility of articulating cultural identity and subjectivity from an aesthetic point of view must involve critical values which are not simply dependent on established Western hierarchies” (Ippolito 10). Spivak, while asserting her famous claim that “the subaltern cannot speak,” challenges Said’s foundation for colonial literary analysis and emphasizes the necessity of “deconstructing the binary of Western culture” (Ippolito 11). Homi Bhabha’s analysis pushes beyond this binary deconstruction, coining the term “hybridity” when examining “split” identity of the postcolonial subject (ibid.).

In *Creole Identity in the French Caribbean Novel*, H. Adlai Murdoch (2001) examines five Caribbean novels in the context of a larger conversation that challenges us to conceptualize “creoleness” and its discursive hybridity. Murdoch emphasizes the Caribbean novel’s “insistence of discontinuity” and its attempts to re-present and reinvent a space that incorporates fluid and shifting identities. The “doubleness” of

the Caribbean subject and the tensions of cross-culturality are emphasized while questions of Otherness, subjectivity, modernity, and pluralism are simultaneously explored.

Many scholars, including Murdoch, have highlighted the importance of Christopher Columbus's arrival in the New World in 1492 and have cited this event as the beginning of the modern era as it is now commonly recognized. Ethnic and cultural exchange with Africa ushered in an emerging modernity and established the Caribbean as the inheritor of twin trajectories. The ambiguities implicit in Caribbean identity are shaped by the destruction of early Amerindian populations, the transportation and enslavement of an African labor force, the presence of Indian and Chinese indentured servants, and the integration of British, French, Spanish, Dutch, and Portuguese cultures (Murdoch, "Creole Identity" 1). The modernity birthed by the Caribbean context involves a cycle of violence that is indissoluble from the colonial project.

It is important to challenge the term "loyalty" as scholars have used it to speak of relationships generated within the Caribbean mentality that are tied to various metropolitan cultures. Gordon K. Lewis argues that the Caribbean's "historical tardiness" (in terms of national independence) can be tied to a "perverse attachment to the governing colonial power" (Lewis 239-40). When considered in the context of Lewis' argument, the idea of this "perverse attachment to the governing colonial power" is more severe as Guadeloupe and Martinique are still official overseas regions of France since the departmentalization of the islands in 1946.

For the DOMS of the French Caribbean, neither independent territories nor fully integrated entities of their ever-present Metropole,

the persistent sense of double vision that has framed their outlook since the ambiguities of France's 1946 departmentalization law set them on an equal footing with the mainland sums up quite effectively the ironies and inconsistencies of this unique relationship. (Murdoch, "Creole Identity" 121)

The sociohistorical and cultural dualities of alienation and belonging are important elements in the social reality of both Guadeloupe and Martinique. Scholars have recognized the departmentalization of the overseas colonies as an important catalyst for the subsequent attempts of Caribbean authors to explore alternate structures for articulating Antillean identity.

Murdoch argues that Caribbean thinkers have responded more to the geopolitical paradoxes of the ties to the French mainland than to the ties that have been severed in an attempt to exercise freedom of action. The discursive nature of Antillean identity can be seen in the varied narrative strategies and structures employed by Caribbean authors. Within Antillean fiction we see alternate ways of approaching accepted notions of subjectivity, otherness, and modernity. The "doubleness" of the Creole figure stems from the pluralism of Caribbean modernity.

Patricia Joan Saunders, in her extensive work on Caribbean literature, argues that it is the task of the colonial subject to create a space that would permit the conceptualization of an "alter/native" reality that breaks free of the hegemonic structures of colonialism (Saunders 5). Inventing this existential space for "selfhood" involves, as Saunders argues, a recognition of the social and historical circumstances from which, in the words of Édouard Glissant, the Caribbean "irrupts" into modernity (Saunders 4). This irruption into modernity has generated a specific

narrative form, one that challenges the master historical narrative established by Western colonialism.

Gender as a Means of Deconstruction

Carole Boyce Davies has produced significant scholarship on the subjects of Black women writers and Caribbean identity discourse. In *Out of Kumbala: Caribbean Women and Literature* Carole Boyce Davies argues along with Elaine S. Fido that “Caribbean women’s writing...has to be understood first within the context of the various imperialist discourses and then against them as a rewriting of those discourses” (Boyce Davies 2). This articulation is in line with Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin’s argument in *The Empire Writes Back* argument that “literary decolonization” is essentially:

...a refusal of the categories of imperial culture, its aesthetic, its illusory standard of normative or ‘correct’ usage, and its assumption of a traditional and fixed meaning inscribed in the words- and then by appropriation of the colonizer’s language which is made ‘to bear the burden’ of one’s own cultural experience...(Ashcroft and Tiffin 38)

This basic understanding of postcolonial theory is useful in approaching Antillean women’s writing. It is essential however that Antillean women’s writing also be considered in relation to patriarchal discourse and oppression in postcolonial societies (Ippolito 29).

Essentially, Antillean literature, specifically literature produced by women authors, is concerned with deconstructing the established Western literary canon. The deconstruction of that canon and the upset of established binaries (black/white,

master/slave, colonized/colonizer) leads to the construction of new spaces in which new narratives and new histories must be erected. This “postcolonial” space is the space in which Antillean women’s literature has emerged not only to defy the Otherness imposed on them by the West but also to subvert the Otherness imposed on them by men and male dominated discourses. The steady emergence of postcolonial literature demands new rhetoric. As Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Fido Claim, “In a more balanced reconstruction of Caribbean literary history, we would find that women writers are critical to our redefined understanding of Caribbean literature. Out of this voicelessness and absence, contemporary Caribbean women writers are beginning some bold steps to creative expression” (Boyce Davies 2).

Abena Busia keenly articulates the constructed absence of Black female subjects by arguing that where “the colonized male encounters not himself, but his antithesis; the colonized woman encounters only erasure” (Saunders 10). Literary critics and scholars have recognized that while many Caribbean writers engage in the debate commonly recognized as the “Quarrel with History,” to resolve the conflict of “what *can* be known and what *must* be thought,” women writers have had to cope with the added experience of having their personal gendered histories compromised because they were not in line with nationalist political agendas.

The work of Maryse Condé is often compared with the work of other Francophone women writers from Martinique, Guadeloupe and Haiti including Edwidge Danticat, Ina Césaire, Gisèle Pineau, and Dany Bébel-Gisler, among others. Maryse Condé has explored many of questions interrogated by these women authors such as citizenship, transnationalism, intellectual production, migration, errantry, and creolization through a Diasporic lens (Mehta 1). These authors also succeed in placing these elements in the context of a gendered contestation of established patriarchal discourses and narratives. Maryse Condé, along with many of her peers, has succeeded in creating “disruptive and dynamic textualities” in her “movement from silence to voice” (Mehta 10).

Thanks in large part to the interviews published between Maryse Condé and Françoise Pfaff, *Entretiens avec Maryse Condé* [*Conversations with Maryse Condé*], her readers have access to many biographical details about her life that provide a rich context of background experience for the literature she has published. Condé speaks about her experiences in Paris, her time in Africa, her opinions on major theoretical movements such as *la négritude*, specific novels and essays she has written, as well as general thoughts on what it means to be an Antillean woman writer and on the question of feminism.

After completing her *baccalauréat* in Guadeloupe, Maryse Condé moved to Paris to study at the Lycée Fénélon in 1953. After meeting Mamadou Condé in a rehearsal of Jean Genet’s *Les Nègres/The Blacks*, the two were married in 1959 and Condé eventually moved to Guinea to join Mamadou. While in Guinea, Condé was exposed to Marxism as well as other political theories and entered into “a kind of euphoria” that arose from the transition “from political daydreaming to a true political

consciousness”(Pfaff, “Conversations” 9-10). As Sékou Touré’s regime imprisoned Condé’s acquaintances and colleagues, her marriage to Mamadou deteriorated despite the three children they had together and the couple separated by 1964 (Barbour 4).

Condé accepted a teaching job in Ghana at Kwame Nkrumah’s Institute for Ideological Training where she worked with other teachers to write “textbooks adapted to Ghana that did not bear the imprint of colonial ideology”(Pfaff, “Conversations”27). It was in Ghana that Condé began to reflect “more deeply on Africa, its reality and myths, the future and problems of socialism...”(Pfaff, “Conversations”14). Condé’s Guinean passport made her suspect to the new government after Nkrumah’s power ended in 1966 and she and her children were eventually deported. Ultimately, Condé’s time spent in Africa divested her of “any myths she might have had about this overdetermined region of the world” and she developed a critical gaze when it came to wide sweeping political agendas of liberation (Barbour 5).

In 1976, Condé defended her doctoral dissertation with honors on “the definition of the Negro in the Negritude movement” and published her first novel *Hérémakhonon*. Condé then published several book-length essays including *La parole des femmes: Essai sur des romancières des Antilles de langue française* and although her first novel fell under heavy criticism, making her swear “she would never right again,” Condé was invited to lecture in the US on literature from *la francophonie* (Condé "Autobiographical Essay"). She then went on to marry Richard Philcox, published *Ségou*, and began work on *Moi Tituba sorcière* after receiving a Fulbright Grant from Occidental College.

After moving back to Guadeloupe, Condé published *Traversée de la Mangrove* to describe the changes she was observing: “The mangrove swamp had been filled in to build a garbage incinerator. Gosier and Ste. Anne, once peaceful fishing villages, had become tourist paradises, bristling with four-star hotels, golf courses and marinas” (Condé "Autobiographical Essay"). *Traversée de la Mangrove* was published the same year Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant published *Éloge de la créolité* focusing on “a call for a revisioning of the concept of “Caribbeanness” as a source of solidarity among peoples of the Caribbean and for an ‘authentic’ language in which to express that vision” (Barbour 6). In her essay “Habiter ce pays, la Guadeloupe” Condé expresses the effects that her return to Guadeloupe had on her writing:

To live in this land is to learn to write all over again. To change almost entirely one’s way of writing. To live in this land is also to learn a certain social fabric all over again. To live in this land is to solve an enigma, the enigma of the cultural particularisms which persist... To live in this land is to speak of it in the present. It is to write of it in the present...” (qtd. and trans. by Lionnet)

Françoise Lionnet recognizes *Traversée de la Mangrove* as a “space in which new configurations [of identity] can begin to be glimpsed” and “the longstanding cultural pluralism of the postcolonial world” is transformed into a “positive point of departure” (Lionnet 80,73).

Condé returned to the United States and accepted a teaching position at the University of California, Berkeley. She left Berkeley to teach at University of Maryland and University of Virginia before moving to New York City in 1995 to teach at Columbia University. Reflecting on her experiences lived in between

Guadeloupe and the U.S. Condé states in her autobiographical essay that she developed “a certain taste for nomadic life”: “I realized that being rooted in one spot is a form of death. One has to carry one’s roots from place to place and, without knowing it, I had adopted Édouard Glissant’s theory of the rhizome identity” (Condé qtd. in Barbour 7). Condé’s experience with Glissant’s rhizome identity can be seen across the body of her work.

Condé’s oeuvre includes essays, novels, and stories that consistently grant a voice to the previously silenced and invoke agency in bodies paralyzed by colonialism and restrictive identity constructs. *La vie scélérate* [*Tree of Life*], *Les derniers rois mages* [*The Last of the African Kings*], and *Desirada*, simultaneously reveal a continual concern for patrilineage on the part of the characters and a concerted effort on the part of the author to “relinquish patrilinear models for the ‘family tree’” (Barbour 24). In her essay “(Up)rooting the Family Tree: Genealogy and Space in Maryse Condé’s *Fiction*,” Johanna Garvey argues that contemporary daughters can begin to trace a path that is not genealogical, as they turn to writing-as-becoming and claim new spaces in which to shape a new identity” (Garvey).

In *La vie scélérate*, the main woman character, Coco, struggles to uncover missing histories. Like in many of her narratives, the main female character is also an emerging writer:

Il se préparait ce temps où personne ne saurait plus raconter le passé familial, faute de connaissance. Où les vivants n’apparaîtraient plus au jour après d’interminables gestations de ventre en ventre pour se doter d’un capital génétique séculaire. Où le présent ne serait plus que le présent. Et l’individu que l’individu...

The time would come when none would be able to recount the family's past for lack of knowledge. When the living would no longer issue forth endowed with an ancient genetic heritage after interminable pregnancies in one belly or another. When the present would be nothing but the present. And the individual nothing but the individual. (qtd. in Garvey 165)

Later, Coco resolves herself to telling a story that can be set down in words.

Il faudrait que je la raconte [l'histoire] et ce serait mon monument aux morts à moi. Un livre bien différent de ceux ambitieux qu'avait rêvés d'écrire ma mère... Un livre... qui pèserait quand même son poids de chair et de sang. Histoire des miens.

I would have to tell [the story] and it would be a memorial monument of my own. A book quite different from those ambitious ones my mother had dreamed of writing... A book... heavy with its weight of flesh and blood. The story of my people. (qtd. in Garvey 166).

Coco remaps genealogies in the written world and chooses “chaotic diversity” over linearity, engaging in rhizomatic wanderings rather than the constrictive space of a single root (Garvey 166).

It is not the goal of this project to engage in a broad analysis of all of Condé's narrative fiction but it is important to note that the themes I'm exploring in my analysis of *Le cœur à rire et à pleurer* and *Trois femmes à Manhattan* are actively engaged across the breadth her oeuvre. Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine S. Fido use the term “quilted narrative” to describe the work of Maryse Condé in their introduction to *Out of the Kumbala*. Condé's braided, or woven narrative quilts a multitude of elements together. She braids her own lived experience, an experience that is rich with intellectual theories and political stirrings that have occurred during her lifetime, with

fictional and narrative beauty that changes the language and mode of fictional discourse (Barbour 16).

Specificities du langage

Engaging in an analysis of the work of Maryse Condé requires the consideration of a broad range of terms and theoretical and intellectual movements that have influenced her work and that have also shaped the context of the social reality that she writes from. I want to clarify the terms and theories that I engage with in this project in the hopes of further clarifying the intention of my argument. I do acknowledge however that there are existing debates regarding many of these terms and theories and that my perspective, although firm, does not go unchallenged. Ultimately, many of the critics and scholars who make up the discourse surrounding this literature and the relevant theoretical movements are generally speaking of the similar phenomena. It is still important however to consider the arguments behind specific word usage.

The Caribbean is a region that includes the Caribbean Sea, more than 7,000 islands, inlets, and cays, and the surrounding coasts (Asann). The island arcs formed at the edges of the Caribbean Sea are most commonly referred to as the West Indies. This region includes the Antilles, the Bahamas, and the Turks and Caicos Islands (Lucayan Archipelago). The Antilles are divided into the Greater Antilles and the Lesser Antilles. The Greater Antilles includes the islands of Cuba, Jamaica, Hispaniola (Haiti and the Dominican Republic), and Puerto Rico. The Lesser Antilles

include the Leeward Islands, the Windward Islands, and the Leeward Antilles. The non-sovereign territories of Guadeloupe and Martinique make up part of the Lesser Antilles (Guadeloupe belonging to the Leeward Islands and Martinique belonging to the Windward Islands).

Many of the scholars and theorists I've encountered during the course of this project use the term "Caribbean" in their literary analyses. Others use the term "West Indian," and others "Antillean." Because these terms are so region specific, it would be irresponsible for me to alter the vocabulary of these theorists and scholars when directly citing their arguments. When citing a direct argument made by a theorist, scholar, or author in this project I utilize the language they have chosen. When articulating the specifics of my argument as it pertains to the work of Maryse Condé, I use the term "Antillean". Although the Antilles include territories colonized by The United Kingdom and the Kingdom of the Netherlands, my usage of the term is meant to refer specifically to the French Antilles of Martinique and Guadeloupe.

The islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe have distinct and unique histories and it is important to distinguish them from other islands within the Caribbean. While other islands have already established histories of decolonization and emancipation, Martinique and Guadeloupe remain under the official influence of France, a reality informed by the transition from colony to *Département d'Outre-Mer* in 1946. In this context it is difficult to discuss Maryse Condé in exactly the same way one might discuss authors such as Jamaica Kincaid or Michelle Cliff simply because those authors are engaged with the retelling of stories and the uncovering of a silenced history in the context of a postcolonial reality that is simply not congruent with the social and political reality of Martinique and Guadeloupe.

Voices of Black women comprise a vital part of Caribbean literature. Although many Caribbean islands share similar socio-political histories that involve hegemonic power structures, racial divisions marked by oppression, and political and social resistance to authoritarian systems of knowledge imposed by a colonial presence, it is important to make distinctions. The Grenadian-American poet Audre Lorde has warned against the dangers of ignoring difference rather than embracing and exploring it. It is dangerous to group the all the writing produced by Black women in the region under umbrella term 'Caribbean literature' because "differences of language, culture, and ethnicity contribute powerfully to the creative tensions within women's literature of the region" (Ippolito 7).

When considering the usage of broad terms such as 'Caribbean' while discussing Black women's writing in the region, it is critical, absolutely necessary to also clarify the term 'Diaspora.' At the core, diaspora results from acts of historical violence. This applies to general diasporic realities, the Caribbean Diaspora, and the Black Diaspora, of which I speak most frequently in this project. The horrors of the trans-Atlantic African Middle Passage and the collective trauma induced by the 'peculiar' institution of slavery inform global diasporic trajectories. Although it is hard to pinpoint one completely unified idea of diaspora, engaging in creative resistance in literature in order to heal the traumas of diaspora is an act that is embraced by many Caribbean women writers (Mehta 10).

There is significant scholarship in support of the use of 'African Diaspora' in the place of 'Black Diaspora,' especially from theorists such as Paul Tiyambe Zeleza. Zeleza argues that despite the rising popularity of diaspora studies, full understanding remains limited simply because it is difficult to define exactly what is meant by the

term ‘diaspora’ in general. In *Rewriting the African Diaspora: Beyond the Black Atlantic*, Zeleza examines Paul Gilroy’s seminal text *The Black Atlantic* and sites what he sees as the four dominant dimensions of the ‘Africa’ diasporas: intra-Africa, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean, and Atlantic diasporas. Zeleza argues that there has been a tendency to privilege the Atlantic (the Anglophone or American branch of the ‘African’ diaspora) and that using the term ‘Black’ to describe diaspora ascribes a racial qualifier that imposes itself on people who might not claim that specific/total racial identity (Zeleza).

I chose the term ‘Black Diaspora’ and chose to write Black with a capital “b” because Black is a political and social identity and not simply a racial identity delineating a different sub-genus or sub-division of the human species. I use the terms ‘Black’ and ‘Black Diaspora’ because although I understand that there are large population groups within the Black Diaspora that don’t individually identify as being partially or fully ‘Black’ in the racial sense, it is still a historical, political, social, and ontological reality that many different population groups are irrefutably connected to. I do not use ‘Black’ as a way to collapse all racial, ethnic, and cultural distinctions into one model of absolute Blackness nor do I ignore the push by writers such as Maryse Condé and Sylvia Wynter to move towards a vocabulary that is based more on what it means to be “human” rather than on racial essentialisms. No matter the complexities, it is impossible to ignore the political, social, economic, and ethnic elements tied to the Black Diaspora, elements that constitute a strong presence within the work of Maryse Condé.

Diasporic crossings

My project engages with questions of origin and demonstrates how Maryse Condé's literature challenges *négritude's* exclusion of gender and mixed-race identity in its push for African essentialism. She speaks of the disillusionment her generation felt by *négritude's* promise that Africa would be an absolute "home" and questions the consciousness that this type of discourse places on so many different Black realities (Barbour 18). The African essentialism at the base of *négritude* ignores Caribbean difference. This is another reason why I have chosen to use the terms 'Black' and 'Black Diaspora.' I also cannot speak exclusively of the Caribbean Diaspora because so much of Condé's oeuvre involves processes of migration between many different nations around the world. My usage of the term Black Diaspora is similarly meant to engage with population groups that claim multiple nationalities.

The Caribbean has been described as a diaspora space by Maryse Condé along with other writers such as Stuart Hall, Antonio Benítez-Rojo, and Édouard Glissant. With fluid rhizomatic roots (as articulated by Glissant's theory), the Caribbean Diaspora has experienced the migratory influx of populations from Africa, Europe, India, China, Lebanon, and Syria through colonization, slavery, and transnational commerce (Mehta 2). Benítez-Rojo argues that the Caribbean represents a space of violence and cultural accommodation in processes of "syncreticism, acculturation, transculturation, assimilation, deculturation, indigenization, creolization, cultural *mestizaje*, cultural *cimarronaje*, cultural miscegenation, cultural resistance, etc" (Benítez Rojo 37).

According to this complex understanding of diaspora as articulated by Benítez-Rojo, the Caribbean constantly regenerates itself through processes of fragmentation, dislocation, interruption, and instability, processes that are all characteristic of the more general diasporic process regardless of population group (Mehta 3). Benítez-Rojo's understanding of diaspora works in tandem with Glissant's seminal theory of the rhizome, which dislocates the root and instead focuses on a series of concentric moving circles that trace migratory movement across geographic boundaries and inform an identity that is not constricted spatially; it is free to embrace the pluralism inherent in a broader diasporic understanding of identity. In this sense, many scholars have chosen not framed diaspora not within a fixed setting. Diaspora exists in a space that involves unpredictable and spontaneous fluxes, movements, and nonlinear paths. The Caribbean subject experiences a social reality that is informed by patterns of transnational movement, nomadic and migratory subjectivity, and complex intersections of race, class, gender, citizenship, and notions of belonging.

In an effort to avoid generalizations, it is important to note the specific case of Haiti and Haitian women writers' understanding of diaspora. For Haitian women writers, diaspora writing often becomes a “commemorative act to remember the horror of slavery and other diasporic passages” (Mehta 12). Authors such as Edwidge Danticat and Evelyne Trouillot use their fiction as a platform for human rights issues, while still articulating the complexity of the subjectivity of their female protagonists. Many Haitian writers use the Kreyol spelling of *dyaspora* to emphasize the specificity of their own history and as “a conduit to negotiate identity and the parameters of belonging” (Mehta 14).

The situation in Martinique and Guadeloupe is of course markedly different from the Haitian reality. Although the departmental law of 1946 granted the same rights as those enjoyed by the French citizen living in France, the realities of a colonial legacy guaranteed that the territories “resemble colonies of France rather than equal political entities” (Murdoch 132). The Antillean subject is forced to measure himself/herself against the totalizing model of Frenchness that is inherently a white model: “the French Antilleans must continually renegotiate their place in relation to the totalizing French ‘nous’ (we) in order to be able to assert their own complex specificity within the larger context of subjection to the metropole” (ibid).

The diasporic experience for Antillean subjects is tied to this idea of “doubleness,” an identity that is tethered to France while simultaneously experiencing extreme alienation. Maryse Condé imagines diaspora in a way that transcends boundaries and limitations that are present in other understandings/definitions of diaspora. Condé’s literature inserts gender into processes of migration and the social reality of departmentalization while challenging the definition of French citizenship that was socially founded on the absolute possession of whiteness. Her literature is itself a type of diaspora theory. The agency granted to her characters enables them to traverse the Black Diaspora, articulating their own transnational identities and giving voice to a female diasporic experience that had previously been silenced by colonial systems.

The Crossings of Creolization and Métissage

H. Adlai Murdoch uses the term “creolization” and emphasizes that it is not restricted to the Caribbean. It is characterized by population inflows and a social reality that undergoes continuous processes of change. The term ‘creole’ itself is ambiguous and creole fiction embodies these ambiguities. Murdoch argues that this type of hybridity brings about a “third space” which sets up its own structure of identity and authority. Creolization is a process that continuously works to transform cultural patterns of different social and historical experiences. Creolization is a process that involves a “discontinuous series of recurrences” that adhere to structures characterized by change. Experiences of slavery, exile, migration, marooning, linguistic and ethnic creolization, colonialism, and departmentalization work together to inform the narrative voices in Caribbean fiction. The voice is at once coherent and separate. Creolization involves the creation of a new culture drawn from African, Asian, Indian, and other cultures in the Caribbean and even incorporates European elements (Barbour 18-19). Although the concept of creolization is “inclusive,” it is still limited and, as some scholars have argued, “tends to neglect the persistent social reality of racial difference that results in everyday experiences of racism” (Barbour 19).

Gloria Onyeoziri argues that *métissage* reaches beyond the concept of creolization and recognizes gender as an element just as important as race, ethnicity, nationality, and culture (Onyeoziri). Onyeoziri argues that the literature of Maryse Condé is a feminine response to *créolité* and that her use of the concept of *métissage* recognizes that the braiding of cultural forms is a complicated process, one that is not free from suffering. Gloria Onyeoziri notes the classic definition of *métissage* in her essay “In the Face of the Daughter: Feminist Perspectives on Métissage and Gender.”

In French, originally defined as (at times forced) race-mixing or hybridization of plants; it has come to mean, briefly, the amalgamation of braiding of diverse cultural components or transculturation that creates a new cultural entity or identity.

Onyeoziri argues that Condé successfully weaves sexual and racial oppression throughout her narratives in a way that establishes a historically motivated, race-conscious sense of the concept of *métissage* while simultaneously confronting patriarchal authority and the historical oppression of the female voice.

The Question of Black Feminism

I don't attempt to discuss Maryse Condé and her theoretical and literary accomplishments without addressing the question of B/black feminism. Maryse Condé has been asked repeatedly about whether or not she identifies as a "feminist," a question that makes sense given her commitment to critiquing male dominated hegemonic power structures and the subordination of the female voice in the face of various restrictive sociopolitical, sociocultural, and socioeconomic realities. Condé creates female characters whose personal stories insert gender into reigning theoretical discourses on Antillean identity. But is she a feminist? When asked this question, Maryse Condé almost always responds with a "resounding No!" (Barbour 12).

Maryse Condé has explained, in various settings, that she identifies more closely with Alice Walker's concept of "womanism" than with "feminism" as it has been imagined in the West.

In the early 1980's, noted author Alice Walker contrasted black feminism with white or Eurocentric feminism, using the term "womanist" to render the adjective "black" superfluous for gender-progressive "women of color" and positing a culturally specific womanism that extends beyond women of African descent but is indentifiably different from the dominant feminism of white (bourgeois) women. (James and Sharpley-Whiting 5)

In support of Walker's concept of "womanism" Condé stated in an interview with Monique Blérald-Ndagano: "C'est-à-dire...une manière pour la femme de ne renoncer à aucun aspect de ce qui peut faire sa personnalité et de renoncer non plus à ce qui fait son épanouissement dans la société à laquelle elle appartient" [in other words, a way for a woman not to have to give up any aspect of her personality or to renounce anything that will allow her to develop fully in the society in which she lives] (qtd. In Barbour 12).

Condé challenges "Western feminism" as it has come to be understood and defined for many feminists around the world. Condé argues, along with writers such as Alice Walker, that the term "feminist" is inherently white, that it speaks of an exclusively white, middleclass, Eurocentric perspective that values an understanding of equality that precludes difference. Condé's essay *Parole des femmes: essai sur des romancières des Antilles de langue française*, published in 1979, portrays the discourse of Antillean women as "full of anguish, frustration, and revolt...neither optimistic nor victorious" (Shelton 720). Condé explains, in *Parole des femmes* that although Antillean women share experiences of exploitation from men, the Antillean reality has marked distinctions: "c'est cette difference qu'il importait d'appréhender" [It is precisely this difference that it was crucial to understand] (qtd. In Barbour 12).

Black feminism, Postcolonial feminism (often referred to as Third World feminism), and Transnational Feminism all intersect with Alice Walker's concept of "womanism." Patricia Hill Collins interprets Black feminism in her seminal text *Black Feminist Thought*. Collins argues that race and class are inextricably tied to the Black feminist experience and that feminism, automatically ascribed to a white identity, failed to recognize these essential elements. Although the Black feminist movement in the United States was born out of the Civil Rights movement of the 60's and 70's and established itself mainly within a specific American context, similar movements such as the *womanist* movement and Postcolonial Feminism share similar views on oppression and sexism that comes from men and from various oppressive political, social, and economic systems.

Although there is a vast body of published and unpublished scholarship surrounding Black feminism and its claims, claims that are certainly relevant to the Antillean woman writer and her fiction, my project does not seek to restrict the work of Maryse Condé within any one particular theoretical framework. Condé states clearly in her interview with Françoise Pfaff that she does not particularly identify as a feminist.

- (FP) Est-ce que tu es féministe ?
- (MC) On m'a demandé cela cent fois et je ne sais même pas ce que cela veut dire exactement, alors je ne pense pas l'être. Si tu poses la question aux USA, on te dira sûrement non. (Pfaff, "Entretiens" 47)

- (FP) Are you a feminist?
- (MC) I have been asked this question a hundred times, and I don't know what it means exactly, so I must not be a feminist. If you ask people in the United States, they probably will tell you that I am not. (Pfaff, "Conversations" 29)

Maryse Condé challenges a literary establishment dominated by male discourse, grants agency to a female voice that has historically been silenced, and integrates questions on race, gender, class, citizenship, and origin into her narratives. Although her work can certainly be analyzed through the gaze of Black feminism, my project argues that Condé's narratives themselves resist attempts of classification. The multiplicity of Antillean identity, as argued by Condé, is paralleled by the multiplicity of her own oeuvre.

Des Langues Croisées

In a Bambara myth of origin, after the creation of the earth, and the organization of everything on its surface, disorder was introduced by a woman. Diosorder meant the power to create new objects and to modify the existing ones. In a word, disorder meant creativity.

Maryse Condé sites this Bambara myth of origin in her essay *Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer*. This project is, in many ways, an attempt to demonstrate the great power that comes with *disorder*. By engaging with two pieces of writing by Maryse Condé, *Le cœur à rire et à pleurer* and *Trois femmes à Manhattan*, I hope to demonstrate how her literature evokes established theory on Antillean identity, embraces it, presents it with a challenge, and eventually moves beyond to transcend it, moving the narrative through a space of disorder and into a space of ultimate liberation.

I chose to write about *Le cœur à rire et à pleurer* because the text exemplifies Condé's characteristic subversion the established Western literary canon. Condé's

memoire eloquently engages with themes of migration, motherhood, language, and what it means to be “home” while simultaneously using personal experience and the act of remembering to challenge both the Western literary canon and the (H)istory established by colonial systems of subordination. *Le cœur à rire et à pleurer* is one example of the autobiographical form that many Caribbean women writers have made use of. Doris Sommer asks an important question concerning the role of the autobiography as it is written by Caribbean women writers.

Is (autobiography) the model for imperializing the consciousness of colonized peoples, replacing their collective potential for resistance with a culture of individuality and even loneliness? Or is it a medium of resistance and counterdiscourse, the legitimate space for producing that excess which throws doubt on the coherence and power of an exclusive historiography? (qtd, in Ippolito 30).

Condé’s memoire, as Doris Sommer suggests is possible with the autobiographical form, reverses models of autobiographical writing that have been imagined in the Western canon.

Le cœur à rire et à pleurer provides the reader with stories from Condé’s childhood and adolescence. Each chapter tells a different story, almost as if one was moving through separate beads on a necklace, each bead its own individual tale but still a part of a greater narrative. Condé’s narrative evokes a collective history. She uses the act of remembrance to tell the silenced narrative of a stolen history. She engages in an act of re-theft, as Katherine Elkins has argued, that strives to steal back a collective history manipulated and silenced by colonialism and literary establishments of the West.

Condé uses the form of the memoir to articulate female subjectivity while addressing issues of home and exile, alienation and belonging. Condé utilizes an autobiographical “I” that secures the individual who articulates her own heterogeneity while articulating her narrative itinerary. Condé’s memoir is private and personal but it also speaks to greater female subjectivity and, as Ippolito has recognized in Caribbean women’s writing, a broader collective “historical and literary articulation of the demands of subaltern subjects to gain access to history” (Ippolito 34). Condé’s memoir weaves in political and social realities that have informed her transnational identity in an elegantly braided narrative. Her memoir does not neglect class, race, or gender but rather emphasizes the necessity of those elements in the broader conversation on Antillean identity.

I chose to work with *Trois femmes à Manhattan*, Condé’s *nouvelle* about three different women writers living in Manhattan, because it is an extraction of Condé’s literature that succinctly incorporates many of her literary triumphs in an exquisitely brief capsule of fiction. *Trois femmes à Manhattan* engages with similar themes present in *Le cœur à rire et à pleurer*, commenting on motherhood, language, alienation, and the multiplicity of the Black Diaspora. The story highlights the importance of voice and the consequences of the silencing of voice. While writing about three separate Black female authors, Condé comments on modern literary establishments, the agency possible in literary production, and the complexity inherent in the articulation of the female voice.

Trois femmes à Manhattan, like so much of Condé’s oeuvre, is about race and class and gender and the grave danger that comes with ignoring any one of those elements in literary production. The story deals explicitly with acts of migration, concepts of

motherhood, and the complexities of language and language comprehension inherent in transnational realities. Condé's short piece of fiction mirrors her memoir in that it uses the personal experience of her characters to subvert the Western canon, asserting her own agency as a writer as well as the agency of her fictitious female authors. The three main characters in *Trois femmes à Manhattan* are each "silenced" to varying degrees but each attempts to reclaim their own voice.

Before analyzing the specific works I have chosen from Maryse Condé's oeuvre, I offer a chapter that is meant to set up a brief historical, theoretical and thematic background from which to approach Condé's narratives. There is of course a vast amount of theory concerning Antillean identity as it is informed by histories of colonialism and race. I do not attempt to engage with a broad range of race or linguistic theorists. The theories outlined in this chapter are theories that I find to be most relevant to the contextualization of Condé's work. I examine theorists who influenced Condé and also theories that her literature has successfully subverted. Condé's narratives construct a unique theory, one that highlights the inadequacies of Caribbean "creolization theory" that ignores gender and the multiplicity of female subjectivity.

I focus on Édouard Glissant and his theories of relational poetics and rhizomatic identity because Glissant and the theorists that came before him in the world of Antillean identity discourse heavily influenced Condé. Condé appreciates Glissant's contribution to the discourse on Antillean identity that took shape in the *antillanité* movement, emphasizing his introduction of the new dimension of language "which links the West Indian to his land, to his past, to his history" (Condé "Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer" 127). Condé recognizes Glissant as

the first West Indian writer to emphasize the linguistic dimension of colonialism and the problem of diglossia in the Antilles.

This chapter explains how *négritude*, while carving important theoretical inroads, was ultimately discounted because of its unwavering African essentialism and its failure to recognize the plurality implicit in a transnational Antillean identity. I also discuss the movement headed by Raphaël Confiant and Patrick Chamoiseau, *créolité*, its emphasis on the Creole language, and the future it envisions for Antillean literature. Although Condé recognizes the striking innovations and contributions of these movements, she remains critical and asserts that the emergence of each order instituted a new order “even more restrictive than the existing one” (Condé "Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer" 130).

Ultimately, the work of Maryse Condé articulates that the dialectic of gender is essential to understanding Antillean identity. I argue that many major theoretical movements present in the world of Antillean identity discourse ignore the element of gender, an element that is also explicitly informed by racial and socioeconomic realities. Condé’s literature enacts theory. The narratives present in *Le cœur à rire et à pleurer* are themselves theory enacted. I argue that these two works, as exemplary samples of the work of Maryse Condé, travel outside established discourse on Antillean identity and Antillean literary criticism, embodying a theoretical turning point.

Condé’s literature does not rely solely on an established vocabulary. She rests neither fully within the parameters of feminism nor within the parameters of Glissant’s relational poetics. She embraces linguistic transnationality by writing in her own tongue, “ma propre version du français qui n’est pas la langue qu’on entend en

France...C'est une mélange entre la langue d'une personne née en Guadeloupe à l'écoute des nombreuses sonorités différents du langage, et mon langage personnel" [my own version of French, which is not the language you would hear in France...It's a mix of the language of a person born in Guadeloupe with an ear for the various different sounds of the language, and my personal language] (qtd. In Barbour 14).

Maryse Condé offers nomadic reconfigurations of a "home in the borderlands" and a lens through which to view the world that takes carries the female instead of leaving her silenced voice behind. My project here is to provide an appropriate context for Condé's work and to engage with *Le coeur à rire et à pleurer* and *Trois femmes à Manhattan* in a way that elucidates the elegance of Condé's authorial voice. Not only does Condé subvert established canonical models, her voice truly does speak in its own language, its own tongue.

Les Grandes Idées: Theoretical Underpinnings of the work of Maryse Condé

Guadeloupe, christened *Santa Maria de Guadalupe* by Christopher Columbus, has developed as a nation under varying degrees of colonial, postcolonial, and postmodern domination since its first encounter with Western imperialism and the theft of its autonomous identity in 1493. Its name steeped in a foreign Christian allegiance, Guadeloupe's very inauguration into nationhood was starkly violent and involved a relentlessly horrific cycle of enslavement. Its very history as a nation has been manipulated by the hegemony of Western systems of power and expression that worked to systematically crush Antillean subjectivity and autonomy.

The virtually continuous volley between European powers for possession of the country began with Columbus and continued through the French Revolution. France's definitive triumph in 1815 with the Treaty of Vienna enforced a relentless reality of foreign domination for Guadeloupian citizens. Despite the secession of the island communes of Saint-Martin and Saint-Barthélemy in 2007, gestures toward an independent Guadeloupian state have been decidedly limited. The

departmentalization of the French Caribbean colonies of Martinique and Guadeloupe in 1946 ushered in the nation's contemporary status as one of the twenty-six regions of France and a full member of the European Union.

Literature becomes a site of creative dissidence but is not limited to a simple act of subversion (Mehta 8). Emerging from a historical trajectory of slavery, political, economic, social, and metaphysical exploitation, contemporary authors such as Maryse Condé have dedicated themselves to the ultimate and redemptive practice of production. Maryse Condé produces, she writes. Autonomous creative production has been rendered complicated and there is a specific and crucial need for the restructuring of the literary canon as Condé has done precisely because of the complexities of Antillean history. Condé writes personal memory into the collective Antillean consciousness. She writes mothers and daughters who speak to the complex and ever-changing tether to the *metropole*. By deconstructing the established Western literary canon, Maryse Condé actively inserts her voice into the theoretical discourse on Antillean identity and subjectivity. Condé refuses to situate herself within any single movement that limits the constructs and parameters of Antillean identity. It is the inevitable plurality of Antillean identity, an identity limited by neither space nor time, which flourishes within the subtle literary devices of Maryse Condé. Her narratives embody this notion of “creative dissidence.”

An extant social violence affects the subjectivity of the Antillean individual and is embodied in interpersonal relationships, systems of anonymous violence committed by neocolonialism, and a forced dependency on the Mother nation (Nesbitt, “Stepping Outside the Circle” 391).

Many, especially among the older generations, are grateful for France's "benevolence" and, convinced that the DOM simply could not survive without France's aid, see themselves primarily as French citizens. Others, however, see the islands' relationship with France as one which has remained that of colony to colonial power and have pointed out that, invested as it still is in retaining vestiges of Empire, France may be seen to have deliberately discouraged the implantation of viable local economies in order to foster a culture of passivity and dependance. (Haigh qtd. in *Journey* 41)

Édouard Glissant describes one specific example of the aberration of the politics of assimilation in the Antilles since 1946: the inflexibility of the French education calendar. Students must take national exams at the same time which ultimately translates to Antillean students having to take exams in the middle of the night and having "winter" and "spring" breaks that are not aligned with the seasons of the islands (Glissant, "Caribbean Discourse" 57-58). Although these are just a few very specific examples, they speak to the deep internalization of a subordinating French influence within the overseas departments.

Glissant is critical of the Antillean "pre-Oedipal dependence on France" and says that the French government's policy of assimilation exploits the insecurity of the Antillean group consciousness (Glissant and Dash xvii). Glissant consistently notes "the erosion of the economic base, the division of the working class, the absence of a national bourgeoisie and the suppression of local self-supporting productivity" which lead to the disintegration of a collective identity and a state of "creative sterility" (Glissant and Dash xviii). This is the context in which Maryse Condé has inserted her voice and voiced the assertive agency of her characters.

Literary production is a means of survival for the Black female Antillean writer. She writes to survive and the act of writing is the ultimate assertion of her agency. When commenting on the contemporary social reality of the Antilles and Maryse Condé's relation to that social reality, scholars such as Nick Nesbitt have aptly identified and articulated the notion that literary production is a means of survival for the female Antillean author.

To survive in such a context, to survive not simply as human animals who have a right to minimal social benefits (the health care, unemployment insurance, aid for single mothers, and other benefits that Guadeloupians enjoy in contrast to many other Caribbean nations), but to survive as human individuals against the constant undermining of one's autonomy is, according to Condé, to construct and produce. (Nesbitt, "Stepping Outside the Circle" 391)

Contemporary subjects of French neocolonialism produce, through various forms of expression, and that act of production constructs a space in which long silenced conversations on identity can finally take place.

Condé's oeuvre does not blindly spout overarching and definitive conclusions on Antillean identity. Her commentary is subtle and nuanced. She achieves it through voice and through character and through the delicate handling of place and time. In two pieces, *Le coeur à rire et à pleurer* and *Trois femmes à Manhattan*, Condé effectively comments on themes of displacement, alienation, language, race, gender, and the role of the female author as she relates to these themes in literary bodies.

Dissenting Voices: notions of language, time, space, and origin in the movements of La négritude, Antillanité, and Créolité

In the larger discourse on Antillean identity and subjectivity, there are several movements that have greatly influenced and directed Condé's own perspective and the lifeblood of her work. Maryse Condé draws on three movements, *négritude*, *antillanité*, and *créolité*, but boldly departs from them. These three movements and the theorists associated with them laid a fundamental basis that has advanced the literary production that Guadeloupe has craved for so long. It is impossible to discuss language and race and the psychological effects of physical and metaphysical displacement without considering these movements.

Taking shape in the geography of 1930's Paris, *La négritude* was driven by Francophone Black intellectuals, writers, and politicians. Convening in Paris after physical departures from French colonies and territories, Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Léon-Gontran Damas were coined *les trois pères* (the three fathers) of the movement. *Négritude* was quite literally revolutionary in its call for Black solidarity and a rejection of the reigning French hegemonic systems of dominance and power.

Since so much of the conversation on Antillean identity engages a concept of spatial transcendence and acts of displacement and migration, it is important to note the influence that simultaneous movements had on *négritude* in the larger Black Diaspora. The Harlem Renaissance in America and Surrealism in Europe functioned and flourished in similar spheres of solidarity and the reclamation of voice and the ways in which new voices are able to operate. Paris became a physical space for students, a haven for Marxism, and the eventual meeting place of *les trois pères*. It is crucial to note that this movement was birthed in the physical center of the oppressive

colonial force that *La négritude* insisted on denouncing. The movement's struggle to emphasize the collective trauma of the slave trade and colonialism's imposition on Black history and Black identity created a revolutionary space for Black expression and production in a postcolonial context. The space was Paris but the heart of the movement transcended space and situated itself in the center of the Black Diaspora.

Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* was the founding counterdiscourse of the Antilles. Condé's 1978 critical piece centering on Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* contains a sort of "Atypical" respect for Césaire's poetic work but stays true to her classic project of the "dissipation of myth" (Nesbitt, "Stepping Outside the Circles" 394). Césaire steadfastly articulates the necessity of Antillean autonomy. Condé's criticism of the piece warns against its blind worship but also reveals it as a true representation of the very autonomy that the piece calls for (ibid.). When describing the work during one of her many interviews with Françoise Pfaff, Maryse Condé clearly expressed her opinion that *La négritude* was no longer a relevant movement in the current discourse on Antillean identity. It should be considered because it was truly a historically revolutionary movement that carved the space for later movements not only to flourish but to exist in the first place. In the 1992 interview Condé makes it clear that she appreciates *La négritude's* ability to encourage a new form of Black representation and that her opinion on Césaire hasn't strayed far from her 1978 criticism where she identifies Césaire as the founding father of Antillean literature.

...Césaire est le fondement de la littérature militante et engagée, celle qui parle du peuple. C'est dans ce sens que Césaire est le fondateur de la littérature dans les Antilles françaises. Son œuvre est belle, éternelle,

et on n'a pas encore fait mieux aux Antilles, quoi qu'en pensent les gens. (Pfaff, "Entretiens" 162)

...Césaire is the foundation of militant and committed literature, the kind of literature that speaks about the masses. It is in this sense that Césaire is the founder of literature in the French West Indies. His oeuvre is beautiful and eternal. Whatever people may think, no one has yet surpassed him in the West Indies. (Pfaff, "Conversations" 112)

La negritude situated Africa at the core of the process of reclaiming Black identity. In order to reject Western hegemony and the colonizer, the negritude movement called for an understanding of Black identity that was rooted in Africa. The Antillean subject rejected the West, took root in Africa, and was unified in a straightforward connection to this notion of African mother origin. Critics of the movement agreed on the necessity of rejecting the crippling force of colonialism but dissatisfaction with this type of African essentialism prompted dissent, and the growth of a strong counter movement that became known as *antillanité*.

Beginning in the early 1960's, *antillanité* brought together a set of principles that formed a complete epistemological break with ideological framework of negritude (Murdoch 10). Instead of focusing on the necessity of rooting the Antillean subject in Africa, *antillanité* focused on plurality and multiplicity. *antillanité* rejected the idea of a universal focus, arguing instead for the specification of a creole culture that is not limited by one geographic location or one set of cultural practices. As Condé argues in her essay *Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer*, *antillanité*'s most significant contribution to Antillean literature is the introduction of the dimension of language. The key to *antillanité* is language and Condé's narratives reflect this

theoretical standpoint by consistently interrogating linguistic tensions in the Antilles, in France, and in the Americas.

There is a significant amount of space in this chapter/thesis to Édouard Glissant and his theoretical oeuvre because his work tremendously influences Maryse Condé and she chooses to consistently engage with his theory. This emphasis on Glissant is also important because although influenced by him, Condé has transcended much of his theory by providing a lens to view Antillean identity that recognizes gender. Gender is marginalized in Glissant's theory and although Condé's work falls in line with much of his theory, it also subverts it and constructs a new and unique platform from which we can speak of Antillean identity as it is informed by gender.

Antillanité challenged *La négritude* by orienting its central theory on plurality and the ultimately liberating effects of a composite identity. Édouard Glissant, Perhaps the most influential figure in the *antillanité* movement, produced a rich body of work that contributed to these theories. *Le discours antillais* [Caribbean Discourse] stresses “the creativity of the composite,” an identity that involves the convergence of multiple elements that is productive in its state of multiplicity and its ability to uproot the Antillean subject, transcending universality (Murdoch 11). In *Le discours antillais*, Glissant articulates the importance of recognizing an emerging creolization and of transcending the simple labels of S and Other. The Antillean subject embraces a creative understanding of identity that moves past the obsession with a single origin (Murdoch 11).

I feel that what makes this difference between a people that survives elsewhere, *that maintains its original nature*, and a population that is

transformed elsewhere *into another people*...and that thus enters the constantly shifting and variable process of creolization (of relationship, of relativity), is that the latter has not brought with it, not collectively continued, the methods of existence and survival, both material and spiritual, which it practiced before being uprooted. (Glissant, “Poetics”)

Expanding on ideas expressed in *Le discours antillais*, Glissant produced a full-bodied work centered on ideas of place and relation in *Poetics de la relation* (translated as Poetics of Relation). Published relatively recently in 1990, the work is a great expansion on his earlier theories and subsequently melts into and informs the more modern *créolité* movement. Glissant argues that the Caribbean has undergone an intense history of displacement. There was the physical transfer of bodies, a constant flux of movement and a circularity in terms of the Antillean subject’s relation to place. The Caribbean has been in an almost constant state of transition and so it is virtually impossible for the Antillean subject to be rooted in one single location. Glissant argues that “relational poetics” must be deliberately unstable (Murdoch 13). Glissant outlines his theory on *Relational identity* with several key points.

[Relational identity] – is linked not to a creation of the world but to the conscious and contradictory experience of contacts among cultures; is produced in the chaotic network of Relation and not in the hidden violence of filtration; does not devise any legitimacy as its guarantee of entitlement, but circulates, newly extended; does not think of a land as a territory from which to project toward other territories but as a place where one gives-on-and-with rather than grasps. Relation identity exults the thought of errantry and of totality. (Glissant, “Poetics” 144)

Relation identity contrasts with Glissant’s outline of *Root identity* which according to Glissant “is founded in the distant past in a vision, a myth of the creation of the

world” (Glissant, “Poetics” 143). Glissant argues that there is a “hidden violence” implicit in *Root identity* and that ultimately when identity is determined by a root “the emigrant is condemned (especially in the second generation) to being split and flattened...he is forced into impossible attempts to reconcile his former and his present belonging” (ibid.). Composite cultures are delicate and although there is also violence associated with *Relation identity*, this new basis for identity is, according to Glissant, a more organic form as it is not limited by spatial boundaries and an allegiance to one particular set of roots.

Within the complex construct of Glissant’s theory of errantry and Antillean poetics lies perhaps his most poignant theory, the theory at the heart of the *antillanité* movement: that of the rhizome. Drawing on the theorists Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Glissant connected the rhizome theory, *Otherness*, and his Poetics of Relation.

The root is unique, a stock taking all upon itself and killing all around it. In opposition to this...the rhizome, an enmeshed root system, a network spreading either in the ground or in the air, with no predatory rootstock taking over permanently. The notion of the rhizome maintains, therefore, the idea of rootedness but challenges that of a totalitarian root. Rhizomatic thought is the principle behind what I call the Poetics of Relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other. (Glissant, “Poetics” 11)

Implicit in the discussion of the Other in the Antillean context is a discussion revolving around a citizen and a foreigner, the visitor and the visited, the conqueror and the conquered. This duality of self-perception confines the Other to a space of

dualism until differences are acknowledged and the Other is thought of in the more layered context of multiplicity (Glissant, “Poetics” 17).

Integrating his concept of totality, Glissant argues that by taking up the problems of the Other self discovery is possible and uprooting oneself can bring one closer to a true understanding of identity where exile and errantry are ultimately beneficial (Glissant, “Poetics” 18). Errantry is neither the rejection of origin nor the rejection of the impulse to abandon. The image of the rhizome as it functions within Glissant’s argument prompts that identity is “no longer completely within the root but also in Relation” (ibid.).

Antillanité and its main theorists moved Antillean identity theory into spheres of a post-negritude ideology. Seeing *La négritude* as involving some of the same hegemonic ideologies that were associated with colonialism, Glissant recognized that enforcing an unwavering and universal connection to Africa was in fact illusory. Antillean identity came to be situated in an autonomous terrain: “neither a detached piece of Africa nor a remote province of France nor the backyard of the USA” (Marie-Denise Shelton 717). The concept of *créolité* entered into the discussion of Antillean identity when these constructs of *antillanité* had worked themselves into the existing discourse, a discourse that had already critiqued the major components of the negritude movement.

Raphäel Confiant, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Jean Bernabé coined themselves as “Le Groupe de la Créolité” and published the movement’s manifesto *Eloge de la Créolité* as a sort of theoretical guidebook for the movement. Although the theoretical founders of *créolité* found major limitations in the theory of *antillanité*, they still paid homage to Glissant, whom they considered to be their “model and master” (Condé

"Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer" 128). Like Glissant, these theorists placed great importance in the notion of language but they laid heavy emphasis on Creole which they considered to be the "sole mother tongue" (ibid.).

The spatial focus of *antillanité*, its inclusion of the concept of the rhizome into the reigning discourse on Antillean identity, and its primary focus on spatial transcendence was deconstructed and elaborated on by the *créolité* movement of the 1980s. Glissant destabilized the notion that Africa is the sole origin and heart of Antillean identity and the *antillanité* movement succeeded in orienting the autonomous Antillean subject in a rhizome identity free of spatial constraints. *Créolité* distinguished itself from *antillanité* by focusing on the spatial, temporal, and linguistic heterogeneity of Antillean identity. *Créolité* seeks to displace the ideology of *antillanité* by focusing on both spatial and temporal displacement (Gallagher xvii). Here displacement means both geographic migration away from the Antilles to Europe, Africa, and the Americas and also the displacement of the notion of origin. Creolization, according to supporters of the *créolité* movement is independent from space.

Images that characterize the *créolité* movement are liquid, of the ocean, "the unity is sub-marine" (Glissant and Dash 14). The Caribbean is marked by extreme cultural flux (ibid.). The transfer of mass is virtually constant and displacement constitutes a primary component of this particular understanding of Antillean identity. However, *créolité* does not represent a total break from *antillanité* and Glissant. Publishing *Poétique de la relation* nine years after *Le discours antillais*, Glissant's theory has adapted to the shifting ideologies of creolization and *créolité*. Glissant's oeuvre really does culminate in an overarching effort that seeks to "conjugate time and place" (Gallagher xix). Memory is in constant conversation with relational existence.

Within this complex network of identity constructs and movements ranging from *La négritude* to *antillanité* to *créolité*, it is crucial to consider where the female voice. Specificities of gender are rarely articulated within these major movements. Central concepts in Antillean identity poetics: Relational existence, errantry, displacement, and plurality, morph under the lens of gender. Maryse Condé integrates the dialectic of gender into the running discourse on Antillean identity poetics instead of marginalizing it. She represents the alienated Antillean woman writer who while asserting her own unique literary voice subverts patriarchal discourse and re-orient established literary canons.

Before considering the role of the Antillean female author and her own influence on Antillean poetics, one must understand gender in the context of Antillean history as it has been complicated by Western authoritarian systems of knowledge and oppression. To understand gender as it operates in the Antilles necessitates the deconstruction of a false History established by the West and a consideration of the Other as it has been rendered genderless. The Antilles is at once a genderless Other, void of a female voice or female subjectivity, and a geographic space that has been sexualized by a dominant male discourse where gender is a founding archetypal hierarchy. Before discussing the essential and influential space that modern female authors such as Maryse Condé have come to occupy in the Antilles, it is necessary to first consider the construct of the *mother* figure.

The prominence of the maternal role, both physical and metaphysical, both

French and African, elucidates the importance of the feminine essence within the Antilles. The established historical metaphor of France as the colonial mother, birthing the Caribbean colonies and asserting parental authority, involves a complex set of power constructs. This metaphor both relies on gender as an archetypal hierarchy and simultaneously renders the Antillean subject genderless in the face of racial subjugation. Antillean subjects who emigrate from their geographic places of origin back to the “mother France,” are faced with the added complication of what it means to return to the Antilles. The notion of “home” is blurred and there is a re-orientation of the motherland. Maryse Condé’s oeuvre includes many mother figures. Her characters are in conversation with their own biological mothers as well as the metaphysical mother France/Guadeloupe/Africa. Beyond the classic interpretation of France as the motherland stands Africa, the ultimate mother at the heart of *La négritude*. This theory of African essentialism argues that Africa is the one true origin. However, different theorists/historical interpretations have each cast France, Guadeloupe, and Africa in the title role of mother /origin.

Although France, Guadeloupe, and Africa have each been imagined into the role of the mother, deep metaphysical, political, and racial differences distinguish each of these roles in their markedly different contexts. Even though the relational identity politics posited by theorists such as Glissant operate in a space of transcendence, there are still geographic boundaries and place specific histories that have molded the mother construct in its various forms. Guadeloupe’s departmental status has ensured its economic and sociopolitical dependence on the mother France since 1946. The Antillean subject, surrounded by shifting social realities, various forms of economic stability and dependency, and fluid racial and cultural allegiances,

have made constructing one national identity with one interpretation of the mother figure virtually impossible.

History, as it has been established by Western authoritarian systems of knowledge, has systematically eliminated Antillean subjectivity and has effectively silenced the specificity of the Antillean voice. Epistemological and ontological violence committed by Europeans since Columbus's initial encounter with the native peoples in the New World in 1492 has deeply damaged the Antillean subject's ability to construct a personal history. The 1492 encounter, irrefutably steeped in an imperialist agenda, sought to impose European dominance on a new geographic and psychological space that was previously foreign to the European subject. The subsequent construction of a Master narrative of History resisted all other narratives and the specificity of a subjective Antillean historical narrative was forcibly alienated to the point of extinction (Saunders 5)¹. The establishment of a new criterion of being became the model that all alternative narratives were forced to measure themselves against. Not only were alternative narratives silenced, but entire populations were situated in an established Western consciousness where they themselves were less than human.

Slavery and the physical displacement of peoples from Africa are also at the heart of this conversation. The notion of origin is complicated by the Western narrative's assumption that 1492 was the only origin moment. The female Antillean writer engages in literary production that seeks to re-imagine this understanding of origin and place, especially in the context of theorists such as Glissant and Confiant. It

¹ "History" here is written with a capital "H" because I am referring to the established historical narrative erected by white Western authoritarian systems of power.

is not a reimagination however that discounts slavery as a founding origin for the Antilles.

One of Glissant's most telling distinctions is that with respect to the uniqueness of both the Antillean and the New World black situation, so that, whereas for the Indochinese or African subject the end of the colonial experience was the *end of an interruption*, this was not to be so in their case. Rather, because Antillean societies "did not pre-exist the colonial act, but were literally the creation of that act," one cannot "speak of structures disturbed by colonialism, of traditions that have been uprooted." For the Indochinese and the African there could be a return, after Independence, to the old ancestral bases of identity, on which to meet the challenge of coping with a contemporary reality, but this could not be so for the ex-slave polities of the Caribbean. (Wynter, "Beyond the Word of Man" 643)

One cannot deny slavery and its legacy as a marked origin when considering the makeup of Antillean identity and subjectivity. People from Africa were displaced from their physical spaces of origin by forced systems of migration, and deposited in a social reality that inscribed their permanent status as aliens. Generations of Antillean individuals are confronted with the legacy of alienation that slavery initiated.

In light of these complications to the historical narrative, alienation operates in multiple spheres in the Antilles. It is present in the hands of language, physical displacement, psychological trauma, and racial subordination. The Middle Passage and the legacy of slavery in the Caribbean fixed the Antillean subject with a permanently alien status. The alien construct and the act of migration builds an Antillean identity that is, to use Glissant's language, committed to the rhizome more than to the root. With a silenced narrative, a history manipulated by a foreign mother, and the continuous undercurrent of traumatic forced migration, Antillean

identity is marked by plurality and the alien construct becomes a foundation. The search for identity is marked by a fierce desire to uncover a previously suffocated and silenced narrative, some other origin that reaches beyond 1492, a space in the connecting waters, and a root within the horizontal spread of relational poetics.

Just as the first uprooting was not marked by any defiance, in the same way the prescience and actual experience of Relation have nothing to do with vanity....For though this experience made you, original victim floating toward the sea's abysses, an exception, it became something shared and made us, the descendants, one people among others. Peoples do not live on exception. Relation is not made up of things foreign but of shared knowledge. This experience of the abyss can now be said to be the best element of exchange.

For us, and without exception, and no matter how much distance we may keep, the abyss is also a projection of and perspective into the unknown. Beyond its chasm we gamble on the unknown. We take sides in this game of the world. We hail a renewed Indies; we are for it. And for this Relation made of storms and profound moments of peace in which we may honor our boats. (Glissant, "Poetics of Relation" 8)

Glissant's root metaphor operates in a space of defiance. It breaks away from a reigning French model of assimilation that holds the Antillean subject captive under the label of the "alien." It acknowledges the silenced narrative and calls for agency and acts of reclamation., Glissant's theory answers directly to notions of alienation, divergent motherhood, and an identity rooted in an newly imagined collective memory/history. By articulating the need to "recapture but also to transcend vanished unrecorded history," Glissant speaks to spatial and metaphysical alienation. Here, the necessity of "the struggle to preserve a sense of cultural identity in the face of metropolitan French policies that discourage and inhibit the flow of a

specifically Caribbean tradition” is emphasized (Omerod qtd. in Wynter, “Beyond the Word of Man” 638). Ultimately Glissant articulates a revolt.

Maryse Condé’s oeuvre shies away from theories that define the Antilles in the terms of a simple binary (Africa versus Europe) such as *la négritude*, and resonates more forcefully within a theoretical identity discourse like Glissant’s. The uprising articulated in Glissant’s rhetoric outlines a break with the established Western episteme. The theory revolts against the colonial mother France and the legacy of forced migration and slavery that informs the complex social reality of post colonial and postmodern Guadeloupe. Although greatly influenced by Glissant, Condé does not operate wholly within the parameters of his relational poetics.

Caliban and Walker’s Woman

Antillean populations have been experience centuries of subordination justified by the West’s assumed white racial superiority. The notion of race is inextricably tied to conceptions of the Other, the Subaltern, and the Alien. Stripped of a collective and subjective history, made dependant on a destructive colonial mother, and steeped in the plurality of a combined spatial and temporal existence, the Antillean subject has been systematically confined to a status that is understood by the West to be less than human. The exoticized Black space of the Antilles is imagined in the Western historical narrative as the direct negation of the logical and fully human White space of France.

The purpose of this section is not to outline a breadth of established race theory or to make sweeping conclusions about the concept of race. This section on

race and Otherness is simply meant to emphasize the importance of race within Antillean history and Antillean identity discourse as is relevant to the literature discussed in this project. Although Condé's narratives point towards new understandings of minority literary discourse that seek new interpretations of race, race is still a fundamental element of each of her narratives.

Race in the Antillean context does not operate within the simple binary of Black versus White. The plurality implicit in the term *métissage* points to the intricacies within the categories of Other and Self upon which Western colonial expansion carved its platform. The term "creole" challenges the hierarchical framework established by the West in order to justify colonial expansion.

...what is at issue here is the intrinsic ambiguity of the term "creole" itself, given its key role in the construction and maintenance of a formal contextualization of cultural *métissage* that will successfully contest the dominant hegemonies of the colonial encounter. As a form of decolonization, *métissage* functions on the discursive level to destabilize the "normalizing" mastery of authoritarian discourses, elaborating through the subtle ambiguities of its intervocalic structure an alternative to the strictures of the colonial bind. (Murdoch, "Creole Identity" 143)

According to Glissant, collective identity cannot be rooted in one origin or one sense of Self. It is therefore perhaps better to consider this reality of interconnected and disparate identities as fluid rather than fragmented. Opposite dualities of alterity and autonomy exist; it is in the connections and crossovers that the postcolonial subject is able to find a place within the exile of plurality. The Antillean subject functions in a space that embraces an "anti-Universal" understanding of identity, an identity that seeks to claim specificity (Wynter, "Beyond the Word of Man" 639).

The discourse surrounding race in the Antilles has moved to consider things beyond the simple construct of the white vs. Black binary to engage new identity discourses from the founding counter discourse of Césaire's *Cahier* to the relational poetics of Glissant and his own uprising. It is important however to consider the reality in which the colonial project functioned. The establishment of the Other erected itself as irrefutable truth. The West waged its colonial agenda on the basis of a white secular criterion of being that reigned over its own negation, that of the *Other*.

In order to discuss Guadeloupe and identity relational poetics, we must engage a brief history of the construction of the Other in Europe, even before the departure of Christopher Columbus in 1492. The idea of an "Ontological Lack," a role that serves to balance and negate the fullness of a true criterion of being, has been recognized in many different contexts stretching from pre-enlightenment European Christianity to the Harlem Renaissance and Césaire's *Cahier*.

Scholars such as Sylvia Wynter and Julia Kristeva outline some of the most significant shifts in the episteme of the West when it comes to the shifting parameters of the Other and the Self. Much of their argument centers on the initial supposition that early forms of orthodox Christianity in Europe constructed a space and understanding of the Other that was rooted in the concept of Original Sin (Kristeva 17). According to this theory, Original Sin became the fate of all mankind. The Ontological Lack was present in all of humanity, initiated by Adam and his initial act of disobedience. Humanity was subsequently made to bear this "Adamic negative inheritance," an inheritance that resulted in human enslavement to Original Sin (Wynter, "Beyond the Word of Man" 641).

Baptism into the orthodox- feudal Christian identity and status as clergy

elevated man above the Ontological lack of Adam's fallen flesh towards the pure and sacred true criterion of being. The prebaptismal laity was associated with Adam and the fallen flesh while the celibate clergy was associated with the "redeemed Christian" (Wynter, "Beyond the Word of Man" 641). This Clergy/Laity binary was essentially synonymous with the Self/Other binary that reigns in our own contemporary context. The political and cultural revolution of humanism shifted the Clergy/Laity binary towards a secular context and a new secular criterion of being.

In place of Laity, the new hybridly secular and religious mode of Ontological Lack was now embodied, outside Europe, in the binary opposition between the European settlers and the New World peoples (*indios*) and enslaved people of Africa (Negroes)...A shift had therefore been effected from the Word of the Christian to that of rational-nature Man. (Wynter 641)

Group identities that embody the symbolic Lack represent, essentially, symbolic death. As one moves further from the optimal criterion of being (the Self) one approaches the lack of that criterion being and subsequently symbolic death.

So, instead of the prebaptismal laity, the Black identity became the embodied Ontological Lack, symbolic death, and the Other. To be Black/native was to be an Other whose fate was as unchangeable as Adam's fate after his act of Original Sin. The Colonial push for possession in the Antilles grounded itself in a specific interpretation of the social hierarchies that regulated its social order. Just as the binary of Clergy/Laity had been divinely ordered, so was the binary rational man/irrational man ordered by nature. Race entered the established social order as an irrefutable science. Both the non-native European and the construct of the Black being were now "projected as being genetically, if no longer divinely, predetermined to be a mode of

Lack defining an ostensibly evolutionarily determined mode of “normal” human being, Man” (Wynter 642).

The theories of scientific racism at play within colonial efforts of expansion were at the heart of the construction of the West’s social order. The specificity of the Antillean origin as it relates to the slave trade made post-slavery identity comprehension that much more complicated as the Other slave transitioned into being the colonial Other *native* or *nigger* (Wynter 643). But regardless of the shifting interpretations of the Other that demanded attention after slavery, the slave trade and the colonial system in the Antilles was bred on Caliban’s back.

Caliban, the timeless Other of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, symbolizes the “native” Other and his inescapable identity rooted in an Ontological Lack. *The Tempest* is an example of a literary fixture within the white Western canon that relegates the Black subject to the category of Otherness and entirely ignores/marginalizes the Black female voice. Condé’s narratives establish female agency that subverts the image of Caliban in the Western literary canon and introduces new notions of Black female subjectivity in the Antillean context. Examining the specifics of Caliban’s role within *The Tempest* provides a contextual literary background for the subversive narratives of Maryse Condé. Caliban’s marginalized identity in the Western canon is fiercely contrasted by the female characters in Condé’s narratives who struggle to assert their agency.

Caliban is a central figure in the race discourse of the Antilles. Caliban plays a crucial role in the colonial social formation of the Antilles and is, as Glissant articulates, a constant with Antillean intellectuals such as Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire (Wynter 644). Caliban is the first “hybrid form of the secular Other.” He

embodies the symbolic death that necessarily balances out the symbolic life of the white Western Criterion of being in the West's social order and established authoritarian system of knowledge. Caliban is the Ontological Lack, the irrational man, and the fallen flesh, fixed permanently within his alien status as the Other. This social construction is the grounding basis for the racial subjugation that enabled the colonial project in the Antilles to move forward.

Caliban was identified exclusively with the "non-rationality" of nature, a purely sensory nature that separated him from the superior race of the white Western world and its ability to possess and benefit from both rational and sensory nature. Caliban exists in a continuous space of lack. Lacking the ability to express himself in his mother tongue, "a monster without language," Caliban is stripped of his intellectual powers of reasoning and his capacity for rational and philosophical thought, transforming him into "the ultimate colonial invention by European powers of discursiveness" (Mehta 5). Caliban is prohibited from realizing his own Self and is imagined solely within the parameters of the Other.

Caliban cannot be revealed in any relation to himself; for he has no self which is not a reaction to circumstances imposed upon his life. He is not seen as a possibility of spirit, which might fertilise and extend the resources of any human vision. In all his encounters with his neighbours- whether they be Kings or drunken clowns- Caliban is never accorded the power to see. Caliban is excluded, that which is eternally below possibility, and always beyond reach. (George Lamming qtd. in Saunders 57)

Although *The Tempest* and the figure of Caliban have served to inform the discourse on Antillean colonial subjugation, the present social reality cannot be contained solely

within this narrative. The master narrative does however point to important questions regarding historical paradigms involving the female voice. Much like Caliban is marked by his identity as the Ontological Lack, so *The Tempest* is marked by a constant lack of any native female presence/voice.

Black women are physically and spatially absent from Shakespeare's island and their only presence within the text is tethered exclusively to their male counterparts (Caliban's mother, etc.). Caliban's mother Sycorax is demonized and relegated to an exoticized stereotype. Caliban himself lacks his own "woman" or as Wynter articulates, his "physiognomically complementary mate" (Mehta 5). *The Tempest*, as it operated as a founding master narrative, speaks to the "incomplete nature of colonial and patriarchal theorizing or racialized and sexualized difference" (ibid). Sycorax is marked by her voicelessness and Caliban is marked by the virtual absence of his female counterpart. Made instead to lust for the White Miranda, a clear symbol of the White rational criterion of being, Caliban is once more defined by his lack and made slave to his limiting sensory nature and his lack of rational thought.

The character of Sycorax is an important fixture within the broader discourse on motherhood and gender in the Antillean context. Caliban's destitution is in part a result of his separation from his banished mother and his inability to possess a birthright to his spatial location of origin. Prospero reduces him to the "savage" Other and Miranda enforces his savageness in her reductive existence as the female recipient of Caliban's lust. Sycorax is a silent mother who is stripped of the ability to root her son in a subjective identity. As Abena Busia has recognized, there is a significant connection between Sycorax's voicelessness and a colonial discourse in which "sexuality and access to language together form part of the discourse of access to

power” (Busia qtd. in Saunders 67). But where is Caliban’s mate?

The absence of Caliban’s mate speaks not only to Caliban’s identity as the embodiment of an Ontological Lack but also to the parameters of desire constructed within the master narrative of *The Tempest*.

For nowhere in Shakespeare’s play, and in its system of image-making, one which would be foundational to the emergence of the first form of a secular world system, our present Western world system, does Caliban’s mate appear as an alternative sexual-erotic model of desire; as an alternative source of an alternative system of meanings. (Wynter, “Beyond Miranda’s Meanings” 115)

Instead of a “physiologically complementary mate” we are left with Miranda, a woman defined by her “idealized” features of straight hair, thin lips, and a rational mind (Wynter 115). Miranda is the “rational” object of desire as opposed to Caliban’s potential mate, a mate of a “vile race” that like Caliban is condemned to a fate defined by Original Sin.

Sylvia Wynter’s essay *Beyond Miranda’s Meanings: Un/silencing the “Demonic Ground” of Caliban’s “Woman”* situates Caliban within the broader conversation of the Other and “symbolic death” within the social order established by a White Western authoritarian system of knowledge. The significance of the lack of Caliban’s “woman” in *The Tempest* speaks to the *mimetic model* of the West’s social order not only because of the character’s physical absence from the play but also because of Caliban’s lack of desire for her. Caliban can only long for Miranda. Caliban wishes to possess Miranda, to reproduce with her, but his desires are never realized as he is doomed by his purely sensory nature, a nature contrasted by Prospero and Fernando and their ability to curb their lust because of their rational nature.

Hence, The non-desire of Caliban for his own mate, for Caliban's "woman," is, as Maryse Condé brilliantly suggests, in another context, a founding function of the "social pyramid" of the global order that will be put in place following upon the 1492 arrival of Columbus in the Caribbean. (Wynter 115)

Both the absence of Caliban's woman and the absence of his desire are ontological absences. The secularly projected definitions of Good and Evil constructed by Shakespeare's narrative are synonymous with the social order established when the secular Laity of feudal-Christian Europe replaced the theological spirit/flesh oppositional binary with the secular humanist rational/sensory oppositional binary (Wynter 116). The West's colonial expansion and the subsequent marginalization of Other population-groups was founded on this secular binary that legitimized the subjugation of the Other by relying on the good race/vile race or rational nature/sensory nature binaries. *The Tempest* enforces the social order established by the West by scripting direct projections of the Good vs. Evil oppositional reality.

It is important to emphasize the clear and crucial distinction between Miranda and Caliban's absent mate/woman. The patriarchal discourse of the West did indeed erect itself on the "silenced ground" of women in the pre-sixteenth century context but the West's system of colonial expansion constructed a new "silenced ground" that depended on the rational/irrational oppositional binary more than on gendered hierarchical differences (Irigaray). Although Caliban's absent mate is indeed female, she is not an idealized object of desire. Caliban's entire population group is rendered genderless. Miranda's battle against her own speechlessness is separate from the

ontological absence of Caliban's woman. In the context of *The Tempest*, any speechlessness experienced by Miranda functions on the opposite end of the binary, far from Caliban's woman and the confines of her "vile" and purely "sensory" race.

The Tempest provides a useful model for examining the social reality of the Antilles as it has been informed by colonialism. The Antillean Other has been rendered genderless, like Caliban and his absent mate, not only by the governing white Western system of knowledge and social order established by colonialism but also by established rebellion discourses. In the effort to provide an effective oppositional front to colonial subjugation, movements like *la négritude* used the referential identity of the Other as an all-encompassing figure. However, this figure was genderless. Classical rebellion discourses have consistently ignored the specificity of the feminine. Feminine Antillean authors have used the act of literary production as a means of reclaiming the "silenced ground" of Caliban's absent woman and his absent desire for her.

The *womanist* orientation posited by Alice Walker furthers our discussion of *The Tempest's* discourse on feminism. Separate from the *feminist* discourse that orients itself around the white female Other, the term *womanist* considers the complexity of the female subaltern, rendered genderless by the white Western referential model of the rational Self versus the irrational Other and also by early rebellion discourses such as *la négritude*.

This therefore is the dimension of the contradictory relation of Sameness and Difference...with respect to the theory/discourse of feminism (as the latest and last variant of the Prospero/Miranda ostensibly "universally" applicable meaning and discourse-complex); the relation of *sameness* and *difference* which is expressed in the diacritical term

“womanist.” And if we are to understand the necessity for such an *other* term (projected both from the perspective of Black American women (US) and from that of the “native” women intelligentsia of the newly independent Caribbean ex-slave polities) as a term which, whilst developing a fully articulated theoretical/interpretative reading model of its own, nevertheless serves diacritically to draw attention to the insufficiency of all existing theoretical interpretative models...(Wynter 119)

In order to release the silenced voice of Caliban’s woman, Antillean female authors must consider an entirely new model, one that grounds itself in the “native” perspective. This perspective recognizes race as it now functions as the “intra-feminist marker of difference” and strives to transcend racial binaries as they are now conceived and imagined, even within the rebellious Antillean female discourse.

In order to understand the way in which Antillean female authors reclaim this “silenced ground” through literary production, one must first consider distortive effects of colonial history; The historical narrative established by the West both both strips the Antillean islands of their gendered specificity and simultaneously sexualizes and exoticizes them. Travel logs describing the “exotic” lands of the New World even before the colonial project had materialized repeatedly imagined the Antilles as a female ready to be taken in an act of sexual conquest. Colonial conquest was synonymous with the sexual conquest of the exotic and sexualized Antillean woman. The islands themselves were imagined in gendered terms and seen through a patriarchal lens of the dominant Western male discourse.

Gender has functioned as a founding archetypal hierarchy in the Antillean context. Imagined in explicitly sexualized terms, the Antillean islands have

consistently been inserted in the male versus female “reductive” binary (Mehta 3). Even within the rebellious discourses of diasporic theorizing (mainly conceived of by male scholars), there is a push for the universal “Caribbean Self” that embraces the Self rather than the Other, but often fails to acknowledge the importance of the gender variable (Mehta 4). Volleying back towards the colonial context, women were written out of the historical narrative established by the West.

The Caribbean-as-woman metaphor involves imagery not only of an exoticized and sexualized female subject but also of an Eden of sorts, a mysterious feminine paradise that is “an object of consumption and defilement because of its alluring and innate nativeness in the Western imaginary” (Mehta 4). Before the land was physically colonized it was metaphysically “feminized” in the Western imagination. The exotic feminine Other is congruent with the mysterious Edenic spatial reality of the Antilles as it was perceived by Western colonizers.

The feminization and subsequent colonization of the land through sexualized tropes of male power have further confirmed the over-determined link between the feminine and nature found in idyllic images of tropical paradises, virgin rainforests, sandy white beaches, and lush flora and fauna. (Mehta 4)

The Caribbean-as-woman works in congruence not only with the Ontological Lack of Caliban’s mate but also with the ontological lack of the feminine voice in male-centered Antillean theory. The “silenced ground of women” is enforced both by the West and by the male-centered discourses of Antillean identity theory.

Diglossia, Contacts, barrière de la langue?

The act of silencing, the act of being silenced, and the act of reclaiming silenced ground are all intricately woven into the tangled poetics of language and linguistic expression in the Antilles. The Antillean context is a classic example of “diglossia” or “languages in contact.” Diglossia, in its traditional definition, involves the division of one language into a High variety and a Low variety. The High variety, French in this context, is the official language recognized by the government and the language used in dominant forms of literary production. Although it is commonly argued that Haitian Creole or Kreyol is a language now distinctly separate from French, the tensions between Haitian Creole and French still have a strong presence within the contemporary Haitian social reality. In the context of the Lesser Antilles and this conversation on silenced history and the gendered reclamation of a marginalized female Antillean voice, it is vital that one consider the importance of language as it informs almost every aspect of Antillean identity.

The “Caribbean-as-woman” can also be considered in the imagery surrounding the Mother metaphor. The language of the “mother” France is inextricably tied to the Antillean voice as it informed, restricted, and dictated Antillean expression. As Richard Burton has recognized, the term “*mère-patrie*,” a French term referring to France is a “curiously androgynous term” in which a maternal (*mère*) and a paternal (*patrie*) couple to birth their colonial “daughters” Martinique and Guadeloupe (Burton quoted in Journey 58). “*La petite patrie*” was the term most generally utilized to refer to Martinique and Guadeloupe between the 1870’s and the end of World War II and clearly divided the Antillean islands from “*la grande patrie*” of the mother France (Journey 58). But after the departmentalization of

Guadeloupe and Martinique in 1946, there was a significant shift in language that shifted the “*mère-patrie*” to the “*métropole*”, thus shifting from a mixed gender term (*mère-patrie*) to one that is entirely and irrefutably feminine (Jurney 58). The term, as Burton argues, is now almost exclusively “maternal” in nature.

The diglossic reality of the Antillean islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe has been a major point of theoretical debate in the larger discourse on Antillean identity. The point here is not to provide a survey of linguistic theory surrounding the specifics of diglossia in Martinique and Guadeloupe but to make note of some of the major theorists that have considered the questions of language whose work speaks most relevantly to the oeuvre of Maryse Condé. Condé remains critical of the linguistic binaries made explicit by the *créolité* movement; her literary production cannot be restricted to a linguistic interpretation that stresses the importance of either French or Creole. For Condé, a forced choice between French and Creole as an expression of loyalty to a certain Creole authenticity ignites a dangerous tendency towards creative compromise (Mehta 7). Her voice is in a “Maryse Condé tongue.” She stated in an interview: “J’aime à répéter que je n’écris ni en français ni en créole. Mais en Maryse Condé” (Pfaff, “Entretiens”).

Although Maryse Condé has subverted the confines of the French versus Creole binary it is still necessary to consider theorists who have engaged in its complexities. Condé writes a world that is informed by the linguistic tensions at the heart of the Antillean social reality. The Other is constructed in a linguistic sphere just as it is constructed in spheres of migration, displacement, and sensory nature. Language dictates the parameters of expression and the voice and speech in which the Other travels closer to the Self. Although Creole as it exists in Martinique and

Guadeloupe originates in French, it has carved a significantly separate space in the cultural fabric of the Antillean social reality. As Peter Roberts has argued:

A creole represents a stage in a developmental process which started as an unstable, structurally restricted, non-native form of communication between peoples of different cultures. This communication has become stable, and more expanded in roles, functions and structures and represents the native language of the descendants of those originally involved in the contact situation. (qtd. in Murdoch, "Creole Identity" 183)

This sort of linguistic creolization finds its origin in the colonial encounter, an encounter that involves the convergence of population groups with no common language. Language and linguistic specificity are "intrinsically associated with the growth of the Caribbean continuum" (Murdoch, "Creole Identity" 184).

In the chapter devoted to language in *Black Skin White Masks*, Frantz Fanon devotes a considerable amount of space to a discussion of Antillean identity as it is informed by the diglossic social reality of Martinique. Fanon opens his book with this discussion. Language for the Antillean subject perpetuates understandings of both the Other and the Self. Fanon's major assertion is that the French language presents a blueprint of assimilation for the Antillean subject but that total assimilation is virtually impossible.

le Noir Antillais sera d'autant plus blanc, c'est-à-dire se rapprochera d'autant plus du véritable homme, qu'il aura fait sienne la langue française. Nous n'ignorons pas que c'est là une des attitudes de l'homme en face de l'Être. Un homme qui possède le langage possède par contrecoup le monde exprimé et impliqué par ce langage. On voit où nous voulons en venir: il y a dans la possession du langage une extraordinaire puissance. (Fanon, "Peau Noire" 14)

The Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter- that is, he will come closer to being a real human being- in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language. I am not unaware that this is one of man's attitudes face to face with Being. A man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language. What we are getting at becomes plain: Mastery of language affords remarkable power.(Fanon, "Black Skin" 18)

Fanon recognizes that within this Antillean context of diglossia, the Other must face the language of the mother nation and is rendered inferior in its presence. Fanon argues that the Black Antillean citizen who travels to France and makes a stay there returns to the Antilles with a physically altered phenotype: "Negroes who return to their original environments convey the impression that they have completed a cycle, that they have added to themselves something that was lacking. They return literally full of themselves" (Fanon, "Black Skin" 19). The Antillean who travels to France seeks to fill his Ontological Lack with the mother nation. He speaks differently and returning from the mother France that to him quite literally represents the "Tabernacle," not only has a new French tongue but also an entirely new manner of Being.

Fanon argues that the Antillean middle class reaches towards a white criterion of being as they insist on only addressing their children in French, saving Creole for servants and people of the lower classes. Teachers are constrained to the bounds of French and treat spoken Creole as utter disobedience. Fanon quotes Michel Leiris while bolstering his argument against Jean-Paul Sartre's assertion that the Black poet will inevitable turn away from the French language.

Actuellement encore, langue populaire que tous connaissent plus ou moins, mais que les seuls illettrés parlent à l'exclusion du français, le créole paraît d'ores et déjà promis à passer tôt ou tard au rang de survivance quand l'instruction (si lents soient ses progrès, entravés par le nombre partout trop restreint des établissements scolaires, la pénurie en matière de lecture publique et le niveau souvent trop bas de la vie matérielle) se sera diffusée assez généralement dans les couches déshéritées de la population. (Leiris qtd. in Fanon, "Peau Noire" 21)

Even now, despite the fact that it is a language that everyone knows more or less, though only the illiterate use it to the exclusion of French, Creole seems already predestined to become a relic eventually, once public education (however slow its progress, impeded by the insufficiency of school facilities everywhere, the paucity of reading matter available to the public, and the fact that the physical scale of living is often too low) has become common enough among the disinherited classes of the population. (Leiris qtd. in Fanon, "Black Skin" 27)

It is important to note that Fanon crafted this argument in 1967 and that Creole has not been obliterated in modern Antillean society. His argument is relevant, however, in that it influenced Antillean discourse and the literary production of female authors such as Maryse Condé.

Ultimately the heart of Fanon's argument in *Peau noire masques blancs* rests in his initial assertion: "Parler une langue, c'est assumer un monde, une culture. L'Antillais qui veut être blanc le sera d'autant plus qu'il aura fait sien l'instrument culturel qu'est le langage" (30) [To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture. The Antilles Negro who wants to be white will be the whiter as he gains greater mastery of the cultural tool that language is (38)]. Fanon himself, expressed these words in written French. He articulates his argument yet again with the words of Michel Leiris at the

conclusion of his seminal chapter on language. In relation to the Antillean writer, there is a definite tension between the language of his official educational upbringing and the intense oral force of the dialect surrounding him.² Michel Leiris states that it would be “artifice” for writers of the Antilles to reject the “growth that took place almost exclusively within the framework of the French language” resorting to a “mode of speech that they virtually never use now except as something learned” (Leiris qtd. in Fanon, “Black Skin” 40).

Édouard Glissant converges with Fanon in their parallel conversations regarding language as a symptom of Martinican “neurosis” (Glissant and Dash xxv). Glissant asserts that this “neurosis” is dictated by the tensions between the “ornate excesses” of the French language and the “verbal delirium” of Creole. He echoes Fanon’s core argument that the French language is in fact one of the highest achievements of the *assimilé* or the Antillean subject that strives towards assimilation into the mother France. *Le discours antillais* or *Caribbean Discourse* shares much of the urgency of Fanon’s *Peau noire, masques blancs* and also speaks from a similar theoretical standpoint. But while Fanon hints towards an “imminent” explosion that looms on the horizon, Glissant calls for the immediate necessity of the transcendence of both oral and written language. Like Fanon, Glissant attempts to probe at the collective “truth” of the French Caribbean in a discourse that actively separates itself from prior movements such as *la négritude*. Glissant’s argument regarding language, like Condé’s work, moves beyond the simple binary of French versus Creole. For Glissant, the Antillean writer must forge a new discourse that “transcends spoken languages, written conversations, literary genres, [and] traditional notions of time and space”

² I refer to “him” because that is the context of this male-centered discourse on language

(Glissant and Dash).

Language itself determines/determined thought. The parameters established by the French language in the Antillean context have historically dictated the reach of that language and the reach of expression within that language for the Black writer. Inheriting the colonial language of the mother France, the Antillean artist/writer saw French as just another device by which the colonial motherland was able to exercise complete control over the Antillean subject. This attitude can be clearly observed in the *négritude* movement. There was a push to discover an “a-historical, prelinguistic world of pure presences” (Glissant and Dash xxi). The written word began to be viewed as a tangible enemy and Black Antillean thinkers reached towards the spoken tradition as the key to linguistic liberation. Here we encounter again Leiris’ warning at the conclusion of Fanon’s language chapter: that a complete rejection of the French language is ultimately impossible for the Antillean author who has experienced the bulk of his intellectual development in French.

To this point Glissant responds with a demand for a new discourse, one that recognizes Césaire’s call for an oral and unabashedly loud expression of a collective unconscious. The collective unconscious is at the heart of Glissant’s argument concerning language in *Discours Antillais*. The work is an exploration of the poetics of the Antillean unconscious where language exists in a space of exchanges, between the speaker and the listener, the conqueror and the conquered, which “together create speech according to given social and political contexts” (Glissant and Dash xxi). This theoretical standpoint on language is directly applicable to Condé’s own linguistic theory/interpretation. She writes in her own version of French “qui n’est pas la langue qu’on entend en France”[which is not the language you would hear in France]

(Condé qtd. in Barbour 14). Glissant diverges from other previously established discourses by recognizing that while French has indeed been contaminated in the colonial context, Creole is in many ways equally problematic.

In his essay “Poetics and the unconsciousness” Glissant articulates an argument concerning the functionality of Creole in the Antillean context that works together with his assertions in his essay “Man gin-yin an zin” that neither French nor Creole can be considered the “people’s language” and that both (as they function exclusively) have ceased to be a functional means of expression.

There are, as we have seen, no languages or language spoken in Martinique, neither Creole nor French, that have been “naturally” developed by and for us Martinicans because of our experience of collective, proclaimed, denied, or seized responsibility at all levels. The official language, French, is not the people’s language. This is why we, the elite, speak it so correctly. The language of the people, Creole, is not the language of the nation. I do not simply mean that Creole is the victim of the conditions of its existence, but that because of that, Creole has not been able so far to reflect on itself...(Glissant, “Caribbean Discourse” 166)

Glissant argues that there is no bilingualism in the French Lesser Antilles because the Creole language is itself nothing more than a deformation of French. For Glissant, the true dilemma lies in the fact that there exists a lack of collective self-expression in the Lesser Antilles.

Self-expression is the antidote to the systematic silencing of the Antillean subject and the silent death that he has suffered through the colonial project and his forced existence as the Other.

Like a strange planet, self-expression beckons. For those who have

never seen words bloom, the first articulations are unpromising and clumsy. The second will be daring and selective. If this does not happen, we will not have a voice. I mean that passion would preserve us from a concern for minutiae- inevitable, perhaps, but easily avoided- that would allow us perhaps to “study” the Creole language, but by depriving it of its own sense of organization. A systematic linguistics can uselessly entangle a threatened language. (Glissant, “Caribbean Discourse” 169)

Moving beyond the “feeling of failure before language” articulated by Jean-Paul Sartre as “the source of all poetic expression,” Glissant pushes for a form of self-expression that articulates a collective unconscious that transcends time and space.

The writer, as positioned in *Discours Antillais*, is “precariously poised” (Glissant and Dash xxvi). For Glissant and Fanon, the ultimate task is to voice the unvoiced. Glissant describes the Antillean writer as a “forceur de langage” (someone who forces a language into existence). The text of the Antillean writer is an articulation of a collective unconsciousness continuously searching for a space that permits for the embrace of self-expression. In the face of the diglossic reality of the Lesser Antilles, Glissant argues that the writer’s function “is perhaps to propose language as shock, language as antidote, a non-neutral one, through which the problems of the community can be restated.” Self-expression flourishes within the gray shades of already constructed binaries of language, race, place, and time. Glissant promotes the speech of a “twilight consciousness.”

In a context somewhat removed from the specificity of the Lesser Antilles, Michel Foucault articulates several points concerning language and literary production that are directly relevant not just to the Antillean writer but to the specific reclamation of Antillean subjectivity by the feminine voice. Even though Foucault’s

essay “Language to Infinity” doesn’t comment directly on gender, his articulation of the written word as it represents a means of survival is directly applicable to Caliban’s absent woman and the silenced ground that she seeks to reclaim.

Writing so as not to die...or perhaps even speaking so as not to die is a task undoubtedly as old as the word...Before the imminence of death, language rushes forth, but it also starts again, tells of itself, discovers the story of the story and the possibility that this interpenetration might never end. (Foucault 54)

Language and literary production present themselves as means of survival for the Antillean woman writer. For her, there exists in speech “an essential affinity between death, endless striving, and the self-representation of language” (Foucault). Fanon, Glissant, and Foucault all stress the importance of carving a space for a self-expression, especially when it is the only means by which to survive.

Towards a Gendered Discourse

For the female Antillean author who has taken the project of asserting her own voice, literature becomes a site of creative dissidence. Already situated as the Other constructed by the West, the female author occupies a space of double-difference. She must articulate feminine subjectivity in discourses of rebellion that speak of collective consciousness but that ignore the dialectic of gender. Traditionally, the role of language in male-dominated discourses and narratives has been to emphasize the “universality” of the human experience and to transfer that experience into the written word (Murdoch 63). Postcolonial feminine subjectivity demands

recognition at every point of conjunction between language and colonialism (ibid).

While the goal of transcendence articulated by theorists such as Glissant and Fanon is generally applicable to the efforts of both the female and male Antillean author, the feminine voice must still articulate itself in a space of double-difference that is separate from the universal. “Radical narrative” and “discursive strategies” root the female authorial voice in difference but do not confine it to binary logic. The female voice is able to articulate a double-difference while simultaneously striving towards authentic self-expression and an articulation of a universal subconscious.

The female Antillean writer thus faces several challenges. She must, as her male counterparts have done, orient her own voice in the ontological debate commonly recognized as the “Quarrel with History.” She crafts her own narrative, one that confronts the History, complete with its capital “H,” that is centered around a 1492 origin moment in the Western imagination. In the void of an imposed “non-history,” it is the female writer’s task to “contribute to reconstituting its tormented chronology” (Glissant, “Caribbean Discourse” 65).³ A new understanding of the collective unconsciousness/consciousness emerges through the re-telling of memory, personal experience, and stolen history as it is experienced by the Antillean woman. To fight against the History established by the West is, for the female author, a fight that involves writing as an active assertion of a voice that has the power to reclaim what had previously been silenced.

Just as the female author must confront the hegemony of established Western narratives, she must also subvert the established master narratives of the *négritude* and

³ Glissant is not speaking specifically of the female authors here but this piece of his argument is directly applicable to the task of the Antillean woman writer.

créolité movements. Female Antillean writers such as Maryse Condé actively work to subvert the Western canon, rewriting it in a way that is marked by the specificity of their gender not recognized by *la négritude* or *créolité*. Though the foundational efforts of these early movements underpin contemporary Antillean narratives, the gendered discourse of the Antillean woman imagines an entirely new narrative, one that draws on these theories while simultaneously forging its own path.

The relationship between language and subjectivity is inherently ambiguous. Maryse Condé successfully appropriates this ambiguity in its subversion of “discursive patriarchy” (Murdoch, “Creole Identity” 63). She inserts her voice into an Antillean discourse that has long been characterized by the “silent ground of women.” Maryse Condé’s oeuvre engages directly with the rebellious discourse of Glissant and while it flourishes within his root metaphor, it does not rest there exclusively. Condé’s literature transcends the theoretical canon and inserts a female subjectivity that cannot be defined or contained. In this sense, Condé truly embraces the transcendence that Glissant calls for when he argues the importance of defiance as the Antillean Self strives for autonomy.

Leçon d'Histoire: Reclaiming Collective History through Memory in *Le cœur à rire et à pleurer*

Maryse Condé's memoir, *Le cœur à rire et à pleurer: souvenirs de mon enfance* is an individualized narrative that explores both a universal consciousness and notions of interiority. Translated into English as *Tales from the Heart: True Stories from My Childhood* by her husband Richard Philcox, Condé's memoir offers stories from her childhood and adolescence that elucidate her early development as an Antillean woman writer growing into her own transnational identity. Condé's memoir engages individual experience in order to generate a specific localized face for the autonomous subject that strives to recover its own historical experience. Place, memory, and history are inextricably intertwined. Condé's memoir situates her individual experience within the broader literary narrative of Antillean identity as it is informed spatially, historically, and metaphysically.

Condé writes of her own experience by weaving a series of somewhat independent anecdotes together that although personal, ultimately speak to a larger

autonomous subject who engages in an act of historical reclamation. Condé's memoir is the convergence of history and memory. The pluralism that scholars have argued is implicit in Antillean identity can be recognized in Condé's narrative in what H. Adlai Murdoch has identified as the "third space." This "third space" constitutes a realm where the postcolonial condition is located, where "classical" histories are displaced, and where new structures of authority are established (Murdoch 5).

Through the recollection of individual experience, Condé engages a communal past. This narrative strategy mimics her ability while writing fiction to locate the multiplicity of Antillean identity within a "confluence of individualities" (Gallagher xvii). Characters maintain differences and particularities within the novels' overall development but still acknowledge the creation of a spatial and metaphysical collective movement. Condé's memoir comes together as a seamless collection of individual experience that, like the experiences of her fictitious characters, folds history into memory, and through selective memory brings face to the autonomous subject.

After considering both the kernels of Condé's memoir and the interviews collected by Françoise Pfaff in *Entretiens Avec Maryse Condé* [Conversations with Maryse Condé], it is clear that she has not considered her identity to be restricted spatially. Although greatly influenced by theorists such as Édouard Glissant, Condé's narrative departs from the theory of *antillanité*; a theory that suggests Antillean identity is ultimately shaped by geography, grounded concretely in the affirmation of place (Glissant, "Poetics of Relation" xxi). Condé was no more rooted in the specific spatiality of Guadeloupe than she was in the physical spaces of Paris or Ghana. For Condé, Guadeloupe was more directly associated with family than any *patrie*:

“Malheureusement, après mon arrivée à Paris, ma mère est morte. Elle représentait le seul élément très important qui me rattachait à la Guadeloupe. Elle partie, la Guadeloupe n’a pas plus beaucoup compté” (Pfaff, “Entretiens” 17) [Unfortunately, my mother died after I went to stay in Paris. She was my only significant link to Guadeloupe. Once she was gone, Guadeloupe didn’t matter to me very much (Pfaff, “Conversations” 7)].

Condé does succeed, however, in orienting her narratives around a common history through the construction of a collective memory in a space that had previously been occupied by authoritarian systems of knowledge. As Mary Gallagher suggests, Condé’s expression of Caribbean identity co-implicates both time and space (Gallagher xvii). This understanding of Antillean identity springs from but is not restricted to notions of identity outlined under the *antillanité* and *negritude* movements.

Poetics of Desire - Est-ce cela être « aliéné » ?

Maryse Condé explores themes of Antillean alienation and reification throughout the entirety of *Le cœur à rire et à pleurer*. We see an Antillean post-colonial social reality that is indeed “*post-colonial*” yet still connected to the French mother nation through its paradoxical status as an overseas department. This political and social Antillean reality is paralleled by individual relationships throughout the narrative. The young Maryse feels alienated from her own biological mother just as both her parents, despite their constant effort to “belong” in Paris, are marked as “aliens” by the White Western world. The authoritarian historical narrative manipulated by a Western system of knowledge acts to alienate Antillean populations.

As Césaire identified in his defense of *négritude* ideologies, Antillean subjectivity was historically systematically denied in the context of slavery and colonialism (Nesbitt, “Voicing Memory” 95). Condé alludes to an alienation that is greater than the individualized experience and speaks to a more collective phenomenon.

At the start of the memoir Condé comments on the alienation she experienced within her own family. She is the youngest by a significant margin and her mother, aged forty-three at the time of Maryse’s ⁴conception, mistook the early signs of this pregnancy for the first signs of menopause. Maryse remembers her mother telling her friends that in the first months of the pregnancy she tried to cover her stomach, ashamed like a “fille-mere” [unmarried mother]. She was her mother’s “petit bâton de vieillesse” [walking stick in her old age]. Maryse ends this initial recollection with a simple statement that resonates in the sphere of her individual experience and also in the realm of the broader collective Antillean consciousness: “je n’avais pas été désirée” (12). She was not desired.

This notion of desire is echoed elegantly throughout the rest of the text. Maryse navigates her childhood with the knowledge that she, unlike her seven older brothers and sisters, was a sort of “accident.” There are forces, in the construction of both Maryse’s individual identity and a more general collective construction, that ultimately produce lines of separation. Maryse’s parents were aliens in both Paris and Guadeloupe. Obsessed with French culture and consciously adhering to proper dialects, Maryse’s parents clung urgently to the rungs of the Black upper-middle class

⁴ When referring to Maryse Condé’s child/adolescent self I am choosing to refer to her just as “Maryse” without the last name she acquired from her first marriage. I am treating her as if she were a character in a piece of fiction. She truly is the female protagonist of her narrative and so I reference her as I would any other character within a novel.

of their community in Guadeloupe. However, just as Maryse is the “undesired” daughter, so do Maryse’s parents represent the undesired Other, birthed from the colonial mother France. In this sense, notions of motherhood and alienation converge to represent the complexity of Guadeloupe’s history of colonialism while emphasizing the simultaneous complexity of Maryse’s relationship to her own mother.

Another initial act of remembrance in the memoir involves Maryse’s first externalized attempt to understand exactly what it means to be an “alien.” While playing outside her family’s apartment in Paris, Maryse and her older brother refuse to respond to a call to come home. In defense of the children’s ability to refuse the call home and stay out playing longer, Sandrino leans on the notion of alienation, a new concept for the young Maryse: “Papa et maman sont une pair d’aliénés” (15) [Papa and Mama are a pair of alienated individuals (6)]. The young Maryse immediately attempts to understand this new notion, “aliéné,” and concludes that it must be associated with disease or perhaps indicates a contagion of some sort. This initial discourse on the term “aliéné” is also accompanied by an allusion to the early death of Maryse’s brother Sandrino. In this conversation, the term “alien” engages with notions of mortality.

The association between mortality and alienation steepens the theme of separation in negativity. As historian Katherine Elkins has recognized, the connection between Maryse’s initial attempts to comprehend the term “aliéné” and her refusal to respond to a call home reinforces the idea that life does in fact end in death and that a belief in life as a circular journey is false; “there is no return home” (Elkins 246). This refusal to return home also speaks to the collective. For Condé, notions of home and safe space are not linked to the Antilles by default. Here, we encounter a major

element in an understanding of Antillean identity that is defined by plurality. What exactly constitutes the home? The very concept of roots and a return to one's roots are complicated not only by the duality of place and origin but also by the absence of a constructed collective history and subjective self.

It is here that Condé elegantly connects individual interiority and identity with communal experience. Maryse remembers her conscious decision to refuse a call home at a very young age, juxtaposing this decision with her initial comprehension of notions of alienation and also mortality. Living in Paris, Maryse's refusal to return home at this moment speaks to larger conclusions concerning the errant and nomadic elements of Antillean identity. The young Maryse is ultimately able to construct her own definition of alienation. Both her individual experience with her parents and a larger collective consciousness inform this definition: "Une personne aliénée est une personne qui cherche à être ce qu'elle ne peut pas être parce qu'elle n'aime pas être ce qu'elle est" (16) [An alienated person is someone who is trying to be what he can't be because he does not like what he is (7)].

This definition of alienation speaks to the deeper themes of separation and desirability that Condé established at the immediate commencement of her memoir. Being alienated simply because one is trying to be something they're not leads to the ultimate devaluation of Self and the acceptance of Otherness. Stripped of an established collective history and being forcibly subjugated to the Western master narrative, Antillean identity is forced to internalize notions of alienation marked by a lack of desirability and self-loathing. This lack of desirability is the very same lack that is outlined in the memoir concerning the parameters of Maryse's conception and her mother's pregnancy. If the alienated Antillean is oriented within the discourse of the

Other and the Self, questions arise not only of individual Otherness but also national Otherness and the orientation of the Caribbean as an “Other America” (Gallagher xvi).

Alienation is both spatial and temporal. Condé’s narrative argues that Antillean identity is informed by dualities that exist in both time and space. As mentioned before, Glissant’s notion of *antillanité* places the core of Antillean identity within the spatial realm. Spatiality is indelibly connected to Antillean identity, but it is impossible to consider space without also engaging the notion of time. *Créolité*, rooted in ideas of displacement, therefore corresponds closely to a universality independent of space (Gallagher xvii). As Mary Gallagher argues, supporters of the *créolité* movement adhere to the idea that Antillean identity is “founded on mass transfer or mass in a constant state of displacement” (Gallagher xvii). Maryse’s memoir situates her in both the Occident (Paris) and Guadeloupe. Maryse experiences alienation despite her location. Her sense of alienation is ignited by personal experience but it is informed by a larger collective consciousness that relies on both time and space.

Other scholars, such as H. Adlai Murdoch have used the term “creolization” to emphasize that the phenomenon is not restricted to the Antilles. The notion is characterized by constant population flux. The term Creole is itself ambiguous. Creole fiction embodies these ambiguities and the personal memoir of Maryse Condé integrates these aspects of the plurality of collective identity with individual experience. Creolization is a process that continuously works to transform cultural patterns of different social and historical experiences.

Perhaps one of the most salient forms of alienation is the alienation manufactured by the paradoxes of the French language itself. Language, for populations in the post-modern, “post”-colonial Antilles presents an opportunity for the reclamation of identity but also enforces ties to the mothering Occident State. The term “postcolonial” implies a certain separation, a severing of ties with the colonizer. However, the Antilles has experienced no such total separation. After the Second World War, France actively dismembered its colonial empire but did not successfully deliver those nations into a realm of total self-sufficiency (Nesbitt, “Voicing Memory” 1). Nick Nesbitt argues, “as the nation-state disappears amid globalization, the unrealized goals of decolonization may seem to be the residue of an outdated, forgotten project, the hopeless expression of 1960’s idealism” (ibid). Although the usage of the French language can operate as an empowering reclamation of identity, it can also be included in the bitter “residue” of France’s colonial imperialism.

Despite Maryse’s parents’ pristine proficiency in the French language, they experienced alienation both in Paris and in Guadeloupe. They strive against an immovable wall of Otherness that excludes them from true inclusion in the Occident. They were educated, culturally sophisticated, and meticulously specific when it came to their social interactions, ensuring that they associated with the proper “milieu”:

Nous étions des enfants de notables, et il fallait faire un certain nombre de choses. D’abord on ne fréquentait personne. Il ne fallait évidemment pas parler aux autres nègres de la rue. Il ne fallait pas fréquenter les mulâtres parce que c’était des bâtards de Blancs. Il ne fallait pas fréquenter les Blancs, bien sûr. C’était les ennemis. On vivait

en vase clos, et on affichait une sorte de mépris pour tout ce qui n'était pas nous, une sorte d'arrogance qui était un des traits dominants de mes parents. De ma mère surtout. (Pfaff, "Entretiens" 11)

We were the children of prominent people, so there were certain things we had to do. First of all, we couldn't mix with just anybody. We were not allowed to speak to the other Negroes living on the same street, of course. We could not socialize with mulattoes, because they were illegitimate children of Whites. Obviously, we were not to mingle with Whites either. They were the enemy. We lived in isolation and displayed contempt for everything that was different from us, a kind of arrogance that was one of my parents' main traits, especially my mother. (Pfaff, "Conversations" 2)

This memory integrates alienating elements of race, class, language, and social ideology. The young Maryse straddles the people and languages of her community just as she would grow to straddle entire nations in her adult life and her acceptance of a transnational reality.

Maryse's description of her parents is telling: "Ils étaient racistes à leur façon" (Pfaff, "Entretiens" 15) [They were racists in their own way (Pfaff, "Conversations" 5)]. While scholars such as Frantz Fanon associate the push towards French proficiency as synonymous with a push towards obtaining whiteness, Maryse's parents are certain that white people are the enemy and have resigned to only interact with Blacks. This tension between a reach towards a criterion of being that has been solely relegated to the White French State and a fierce commitment to a Black middle-class can be considered a broader communal phenomenon that Maryse illuminates through her recollection of personal experience.

The memoir expresses the tension between the French language and Creole within Maryse's social sphere. Living in Paris, the children are allowed to play outside and visit the homes of the neighbors because their parents know there is no danger that the children will speak Creole. In Guadeloupe however, they are strictly monitored and just as they are not allowed to associate with lower-class Blacks, they are also not allowed to speak Creole. It is a sharp modifier of identity when restricted to the language of the colonizer, one is forbidden to taste the tongue of the colonized.

Maryse's parents rigidly orient themselves within the Black upper-middle-classes of Guadeloupe and have little tolerance for any social reality that involves either whites or Blacks who are less "culturally enlightened." Condé is perfectly frank when depicting her parents' "utter prostration before the values of metropolitan French culture" (Nesbitt, "Voicing Memory" 197). Although Maryse's parents reject Creole and solely ascribe to Parisian French, they themselves are alienated in Paris. This alienation while on mother French soil situates Maryse's culturally and educationally astute parents within the incessant realm of "the exception."

Aujourd'hui, je me représente le spectacle peu courant que nous offrons, assis aux terrasses du Quartier latin dans le Paris morose de l'après-guerre...Leurs plateaux en équilibre sur la hanche, les garçons de café voletaient autour de nous remplis d'admiration comme autant de mouches à miel. Ils lâchaient invariablement en servant les diabolos menthe :

-Qu'est-ce que vous parlez bien le français !

Mes parents recevaient le compliment sans broncher ni sourire et se bornaient à hocher du chef. Une fois que les garçons avaient tourné le dos, ils nous prenaient à témoin :

-Pourtant, nous sommes aussi français qu'eux, soupirait mon père.

- Plus français, renchérissait ma mère avec violence. Elle ajoutait en guise d'explication : Nous sommes plus instruits. Nous avons de meilleures manières. Nous lisons davantage. (12-13)

Today, I can imagine the somewhat unusual sight we must have made, sitting in the sidewalk cafés of the Latin Quarter in a gloomy postwar Paris... Their trays balanced on their hips, the *garçon de café* would hover around us admiringly like honey bees. Setting down the *diablos menthe*, they never failed to come out with: "You speak excellent French, you know!" My parents bore the compliment without turning a hair or smiling, merely a nod of the head. Once the *garçon* had gone, they turned to us as witnesses: "Yet we're as much French as they are," my father sighed. "Even more so," my mother continued vehemently, adding by way of explanation, "We're more educated. We have better manners. We read more. (5)

They read more. They are more educated. They're "as much French as *they* are."

And yet...

Both Maryse and her parents are restricted within the slot of the "exception." The Antillean individual is the perpetual Other, and while proficiency in French acts on some level to "elevate" the individual towards a Western criterion of being, it in no way guarantees membership. In the interviews between Maryse Condé and Françoise Pfaff, Condé explains that her experiences regarding her interactions with professors in Paris were marked by the label of "the exception," a label she came to realize had its roots in a deep paternalism:

J'avais découvert en eux une forme de racisme. Ils me faisaient un statut de bête curieuse ou bien un statut d'exception. C'était finalement du paternalisme et au fur et à mesure que je deviens plus consciente politiquement, je devenais aussi plus lucide à leur égard. (Pfaff, "Entretiens" 18)

I had discovered that they were somewhat racist. They considered me a strange animal or an exception. In the final analysis such behavior was paternalistic, and as I grew more politically aware, I also became more lucid as far as they were concerned. (Pfaff, "Conversations" 8)

Although Maryse and her parents spoke fluent and flawless French, they were the embodied projection of an Otherness that was virtually inescapable. Condé's individual recollection and use of memory tease out these restrictions and bring about a new understanding of identity that transcends space, time, and perpetual Otherness.

The act of political departmentalization and the subsequent effort towards "full assimilation" highlight the duality of an Antillean identity that is informed by language. Now full citizens of France, Antillean individuals are constantly confronted with choices of syntax. Allegiances are blurred although some, like Condé's parents, choose to adhere strictly to one side of the binary. Many scholars, including H. Adlai Murdoch, have recognized the field of language as the primary location that houses an "ongoing contestation of the colonial encounter" (Murdoch 21).

For modern theorists such as Frantz Fanon, the push towards the French mainland and the mastery of the French language is synonymous with a push towards obtaining Whiteness. Fanon argues that every colonized population that has been marginalized and stripped of originality and individuality finds itself face to face with the language of the colonizer, the language of the mother nation (Fanon 18). Fanon argues that when the language and projected image of the mother country is elevated by its own authoritarian system of knowledge, the Antillean individual works to renounce his Blackness in order to adopt the mother country's cultural standards.

This argument resonates fiercely within Condé's memoir. Condé's parents, although clearly denouncing Whites as "the enemy," bow down before the cultural specificities of mainland France and enforce a high level of French cultural recognition within their own family. Fanon also recognizes a phenomenon concerning "the Black man who has lived in France for a length of time" and returns home to the Caribbean "radically changed." This individual is met by a profound ambivalence from the "native" subject, "the-one-who-never-crawled-out-of-his-hole." Fanon argues that there is even a change in phenotype and that the transformation is both inward and outward, reaching all the way to his gesture and his stance. Antillean individuals who grasp at the pedestal of mainland French are subsequently alienated from the marginalized lower classes of their nations of origin.

Maryse's parents are similarly alienated in Guadeloupe and in Paris. They draw clear lines of separation between themselves and the "lower" classes around them, gesturing towards a sort of "talented tenth" mentality. Maryse's parents believe themselves to be the "uplifters" of their race, the most brilliant and capable individuals who have the power to elevate the ranks from which they sprung.

Comme ma mère, il était convaincu que seule la culture occidentale vaut la peine d'exister et il se montrait reconnaissant envers la France qui leur avait permis de l'obtenir. En même temps, ni l'un ni l'autre n'éprouvaient le moindre sentiment d'infériorité à cause de leur couleur. Ils se croyaient les plus brillants, les plus intelligents, la preuve par neuf de l'avancement de leur Race de Grands-Nègres. Est-ce cela être « aliéné »? (18)

Like my mother, he was convinced that only Western culture was worthy of existence and was ever grateful to France for allowing them to obtain it. At the same time, neither one of them felt the slightest

inferiority complex because of their color. They believed they were the most brilliant and the most intelligent people alive, positive proof of the progress achieved by the Black Race. Was that the meaning of “alienated”? (8)

It is important to emphasize the fact that Maryse’s parents express a significant amount of race pride. They take pride in the Black race and perhaps their push towards obtaining “whiteness” is not a conscious one.

Although Maryse’s parents publicly embrace their Blackness, by Fanon’s standards, the mere act of denying Creole in the home represents an effort to achieve Whiteness. The encounter previously noted with the waiter exemplifies Fanon’s argument concerning speech and the Antillean subject’s effort to perfect his speech because it is yet another mark of “civilization” that he will be judged on⁵:

Le Noir Antillais sera d’autant plus blanc, c’est-à-dire se rapprochera d’autant plus du véritable homme, qu’il aura fait sienne la langue française. Nous n’ignorons pas que c’est là une des attitudes de l’homme en face de l’Être. (Fanon, “Peau noire” 14)

The Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter- that is, he will come closer to being a real human being- in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language. I am not unaware that this is one of man’s attitudes face to face with Being. (Fanon, “Black Skin” 18)

No matter the colonizer, Fanon argues that every colonized population must come into contact with an inferiority complex that results from the death of cultural

⁵ I refer to the Antillean subject as “he” not because I am ignoring the female Antillean subject but because Fanon consistently uses male pronouns. This is just one example of how much of the established discourse surrounding Antillean identity theory ignores the dialectic of gender.

originality. The struggle to achieve Whiteness is a logical reaction to this theft of history and the forced adaptation of language.

In France the Antillean individual who speaks perfect French is a humorous exception, an interest piece, something amusingly out of the ordinary. At home in the Antilles “he talks like a white man.” A “double consciousness” is carved into Antillean identity when political and cultural dichotomies are enforced by the simple words with which populations are forced to express themselves. Being forbidden to speak Creole in school (and at home in Maryse’s case) helps create a situation where the individual is forced to adopt a language, a way of expression that maintains one specific reigning social reality.

The coupling of French and Creole, or rather their constant faceoff in the rhetoric of Antillean identity politics, is itself rather blurry as Creole is not an independent or indigenous language. Creole was birthed from the language of the colonizer and although it functions in spheres of empowerment and cultural reclamation, one cannot simply deny its linguistic roots. Language is a principal means by which an individual experiences the world. Experiencing the world through the language of the colonizer significantly informs identity. The fact that even in the return to Creole, the Antillean individual returns to a language that couldn’t exist without the language of the colonizer further complicates language’s role in the construction of identity.

It is important however to recognize Creole as a contestation. Creole is a confrontation of sorts. H. Adlai Murdoch argues that Creole as a language facilitates levels of communication that “contest[s] colonial dominance and hegemony while articulating a new, collective identity for the inheritors of the displaced African

diaspora.” For Murdoch, the reclamation and transformation of the French language into Creole informs Antillean identity by letting the language assume a “place of pride” where the collective voice is a voice of protest. There is a communal spirit of revolt, against the colonizer, that is mobilized by the act of linguistic adoption and reformation. The language of the colonizer births its own twin opposite.

Fanon draws a clear line when describing the young Antillean student in Paris. He says they either align themselves with the White world or reject Europe, fully embracing Caribbean dialects and scorning those who dip into classic French education systems. Fanon argues that both these cases cultivate alienation and that in order to achieve disalienation one must first strive towards simple understanding.

The young student Maryse does not fit neatly into one of Fanon’s categories. She embraces Paris, her own solitude, and absorbs new political ideologies and mantras of her Antillean peers. She encounters Marxism, new ideas concerning anticolonialism, and an appreciation for a new perspective concerning the Black world of Guadeloupe. This new perspective was only possible after her migratory act of geographic separation.

...j’ai beaucoup aimé Paris quand j’étais étudiante. Il y avait un élément essentiel à cela: la liberté. Puis, j’ai rencontré une jeune fille dont le père était un historien marxiste qui enseignait à la Sorbonne...Finalement, c’est elle qui, la première, m’a parlé de choses auxquelles je n’avais jamais pensé, de choses comme l’anticolonialisme, la décolonisation. (Pfaff, “Entretiens” 17)

Personally, I loved Paris when I was a student because it had an essential element for me, freedom. Later on, I met a girl whose father was a Marxist historian teaching at the Sorbonne...Actually, she is the

first one who mentioned things I had never thought about, like anticolonialism and decolonization. (Pfaff, “Conversations”)

There is an essential element in this commentary taken from the interviews with Françoise Pfaff: freedom. Condé very clearly expresses her need to leave Guadeloupe and experience the world, and France for that matter, on her own. She separates herself from her homeland and embraces the individual freedom she comes to find in Paris. She is a nomad.

The “undifferentiated spatiality” established between France and the Antilles complicates notions of nationality and what exactly it means for the Antillean subject to “return home” (Mehta 19). The “extra-departmental” identity ascribed to the Antillean subject is complicated by an Antillean social reality in which large-scale labor shortages after the departmentalization of the French colonies lead to a massive migration to the metropole (Mehta 18). The state agency BUMIDOM (Bureau pour le Développement des Migrations des Départements d’Outre Mer [Office for the Development of Migration from the Overseas Departments]) facilitated the migration of over 100,000 Antilleans during a twenty-five-year period before the agency was disbanded in 1982 (Murdoch qtd. in Mehta 18). As Alain Anselin argues, the population of over 600,000 French Antilleans living in Paris today has transformed the *metropole* into a “third island” diasporic space that exists in the confluence of the Caribbean Sea and the River Seine (Anselin 110). The young Maryse’s act of migration and displacement exists within the context of these larger patterns of migration.

Maryse Condé subverts the established linguistic binary of Creole/French by writing in her own interpretation of both the French and Creole languages. She does

not apologize for writing in French and rejects the notion that an Antillean narrative written in French is an automatic act of colonial worship. Condé was raised speaking French in her home. She attended school in French. She spent years studying as a student in Paris in French. Her usage of the French language does not however detract from her own Antillean identity. She imbibes her text with creolisms and crafts an elegant and expressive narrative that transcends linguistic restrictions.

Antillean identity, as interpreted by Condé's oeuvre, is full of dichotomies. It does not ascribe to one place or one time or one origin. It embodies plurality. In the context of Condé's narrative expression, it is helpful to consider Fanon as he quotes Michel Leiris:

S'il y a chez les écrivains antillais volonté de rupture avec les formes littéraires liées à l'enseignement officiel, cette volonté, tendue vers un avenir plus aéré, ne saurait revêtir une allure folklorisante. Désireux avant tout, littérairement, de formuler le message qui leur appartient en propre et quant à quelques-uns tout au moins d'être les porte-parole d'une vraie race aux possibilités méconnues, ils dédaignent l'artifice que représenterait pour eux, dont la formulation intellectuelle s'est opérée à travers le français de façon presque exclusive, le recours à un parler qu'ils ne pourraient plus guère employer que comme une chose apprise. (Leiris qtd. In Fanon, "Peau Noire" 31-32)

If in the writers of the Antilles there does exist a desire to break away from the literary forms associated with formal education, such as desire, oriented toward a purer future, could not take on an aspect of folklore. Seeking above all, in literature, to formulate the message that is properly theirs, and in the case of some of them at least, to be the spokesmen of an authentic race whose potentials have never been acknowledged, they scorn such devices. Their intellectual growth took place almost exclusively within the framework of the French language, and it would be artifice for them to resort to a mode of speech that

they virtually never use now except as something learned. (Leiris qtd. in Fanon, "Black Skin" 40)

It is logical then that Condé utilizes the language that has dictated the development of her own intellectual framework to formulate her reclamation of collective memory and history. If one learns the world through a particular language, even if it is the language of the colonizer, it makes sense that they voice their own literary expression through that language. Maryse Condé utilizes French but she also transforms it. She embraces contestation while still adhering to the truth of her intellectual development.

Maryse ultimately vows not to be alienated. She comes to interpret her identity as limited neither by language nor space: "À deux heures du matin, au moment de prendre sommeil, je me fis le serment confus de ne jamais devenir une aliénée" (16-17) [At two in the morning, just as I was dropping off, I swore in a confused sort of way never to become alienated (7)]. The young Maryse is physically in Paris at the conclusion of the memoir but she has resigned herself towards an open perspective that subverts geographic restrictions and has embraced the notions of "freedom" that she worked so hard to realize. The theme of alienation works itself into virtually every corner of Condé's narrative and she is successful in orienting her personal experience in a way that speaks to a collective community.

« *Leçon d'Histoire* » *History Lesson*

Condé is fiercely suspicious of the history that has been established by the Western colonizer and *his* authoritarian system of knowledge. Condé's personal memoir actively embraces a new form of history, a history activated by remembrance

and the indelible power of collective consciousness and communal solidarity. Condé organizes her personal anecdotes as though they are each precious kernels of memory, separate, but still intertwined; their collective voice speaks to larger conclusions. In the transition from the conversation on language, it is important to note the interconnectivity of history and memory; language functions as “the repository of the collective memory” (Murdoch 206). Language can invoke a collective memory that has been repressed by the colonizer.

The title of the memoir, *Le cœur à rire et à pleurer: contes vrais de mon enfance* speaks to both the personal individuality and interiority of the text but also to its broader collective commentary. The word “contes” (or *souvenirs* meaning *memories* in other additions) is an active noun that implies the telling of a story. It carries an almost fairytale like connotation as if the reader is about to be told a universal myth that they have been hearing all their life. It is personal memory but it is also a broader memory, perhaps a historical memory. Condé recognizes that Antillean populations have been stripped of their own collective history. Their history has been silenced by oppressive acts of colonialism.

Nick Nesbitt’s argument concerning history and memory recognizes the violent effects that slavery, colonialism, and neocolonialist globalism have had on Antillean identity as it questions history and memory (Nesbitt, “Voicing Memory” 4). Nesbitt notes an “institutionalized amnesia” that has plagued the French overseas departments. In regards to modernism and the modern era, the post-1940’s social reality of the Antilles is not a social reality of independence or autonomy.

The search for Antillean identity is directly tied to the abandonment of history as it operates in the context of the established colonial perspective. Condé gives voice

to the subjective and communal Antillean experience while extrapolating history. However, unlike many of her male Antillean counterparts, Condé situates her work within the realm of female subjectivity. Condé integrates the mother figure into her narrative by speaking of both her relationship with her biological mother and the larger metaphor concerning the colonial mother France and Guadeloupe, the undesirable daughter. Even while integrating this personalized voice that speaks to greater female subjectivity, Condé still manages to form conclusions that although informed by gender, are not restricted to it.

Katherine Elkin's theory of historical theft reveals the elegance of the memoir's construction. Condé manipulates limited historical perspectives, inserts her own ideas of memory, and ultimately arrives at this place of historical theft that works to create a universal memory that more honestly informs Antillean identity (Elkins). The master narrative does not permit for individual expression so history must then be stolen if it is to truly inform memory. Memory returns after history has been stolen. This theory manifests itself in much of Condé's fiction but we also see it actively working through her memoir.

One of the clearest examples of a personal memory that speaks to a larger collective consciousness occurs in the chapter titled "Leçon d'Histoire" or "History Lesson." Being the youngest of her parents' children with a significant gap in age between her and the next youngest child, Maryse expresses often being lonely as a child. So, when on an evening walk with her parents, she encounters a young White girl her own age, she decides to befriend her: "J'étais trop heureuses de trouver une partenaire de mon âge..." (48) [I was only too happy to have found a playmate my own age (55)]. The nature of their play soon turns sour however and begins to

resemble a sort of master-slave narrative. The young White child, Anne-Marie rides Maryse as if she was an animal and also strikes her on more than one occasion.

The initial introduction between Maryse and Anne-Marie involves the reversal of societal assumptions. The White child poorly dressed and visibly of a lower class, addresses Maryse in Creole. Maryse, with her clean and put-together outer appearance and articulate French, is confused at why the child is speaking Creole to her. Anne-Marie announces that the two girls are to be playmates but that her mother mustn't see or Anne-Marie will be beaten for playing with a Black child. The differences between the two girls are highlighted in this initial interaction. It is Anne-Marie who speaks Creole and wears ragged clothes.

The play of the girls is disturbingly violent and sadistic. Condé provides a frank commentary on the horrors of the physical and ideological violence committed during slavery. Anne-Marie spans Maryse. She is made to be a naughty pupil and has her hair pulled. Maryse becomes the horse, the slave, and the servant; ultimately she becomes the Other stripped of her agency. When Maryse is finally able to protest to the abuse, Anne-Marie responds by saying “Je dois te donner des coups parce que tu es une négresse” (49) [I have to hit you because you're Black (56)].

Anne-Marie's response confuses the young Maryse. She asks her mother why Black people have to be beaten but her mother evades the question. Desperate, Maryse brings the question to her father and receives a curt reply of just one sentence: “On nous donnait des coups dans le temps” (50) [They used to beat us a long time ago (57)]. Silenced by this response, Maryse is left to consider it alone. Condé's recollection of her father's response emphasizes the communal: They used to beat *us* a long time ago.

With this recollection Condé masterfully crafts an individual and personal memory that voices the desperately violent collective history of slavery. Immediately after hearing her father's response Maryse comes to the conclusion that there is a certain shameful secret hidden in her past and it is best to keep it tucked away like her mother, father, and all the other people around her have apparently been doing all along:

Désormais, je ravalai mes questions. Je ne demandai rien à Sandrino, car j'avais peur de son explication. Je devinais qu'un secret était caché au fond de mon passé, secret douloureux, secret honteux dont il aurait été inconvenant et peut-être dangereux de forcer la connaissance. Il valait mieux l'enfourir au fin fond de ma mémoire comme mon père et ma mère, comme tous les gens que nous fréquentions, semblaient l'avoir fait. (50-51)

From that moment on I kept my questions to myself. I was afraid of what Sandrino would say. I guessed that a secret was hidden at the bottom of my past, a painful, shameful secret that would have been wrong, even dangerous to pry open. It was better to keep it buried deep in my memory like my mother and father, and everyone else I knew, seemed to have done. (57)

Condé speaks of a history that has been silenced. Just as Maryse is afraid to pry open this terrible box of secrets, so has the reigning authoritarian system of knowledge enforced a fear of true historical exploration. Condé uses this personal anecdote to enforce the recognition of a deep collective history that memory struggles to unpack.

After Maryse confronts Anne-Marie she never sees her again. The specifics of actual events in the narrative are sometimes blurred, taking on a rather mystical quality that gesture towards the tradition of magical realism. The young Anne-Marie vanishes suddenly but her presence prompts Maryse to ask important questions that

alert her to a history she hadn't yet encountered. Hidden away in a box, this past has been inaccessible to the broader Antillean consciousness. Her telling of the history counteracts the fear and subjugation experienced by the Antillean subject. The remembrance is a painful act but it sheds light on a history that has been systematically silenced by the colonizer.

Maryse, as scholar Katherine Elkins argues, actively works to steal back the repressed history. Condé's memoir has adopted the project of "evolving a history through imaginative reconstruction" (Dash xxxii). This universal history does not, however, rely on a specific set of "roots." As Glissant emphasizes the necessity of transcending limitation of space, a new set of identity constructs takes shape that is more solidly based in the notion of "uprooting" than of digging into one's "roots" (Elkins 242). In *Poétique de la relation* Glissant argues that history itself is a notion posited and manipulated by Western powers and that poetic intention should replace historic intention (*intention poétique*) (Elkins 241). Glissant uses the idea of the "rhizome" as a replacement for the notion of roots. Continuously growing horizontal stem that puts out lateral shoots and adventitious roots at intervals, the rhizome comes into direct contact with the Other no matter what form it takes.

Glissant's notion of the rhizome resonates forcefully for Condé in her memoir. Condé writes explicitly of the need to take flight, to move, to embrace a certain nomadic identity. She is not resigned to rootedness. Maryse herself is a nomad. She travels to Paris where although met with various forms of alienation, she is able to explore new forms of freedom. Her connections to Guadeloupe are more informed by a connection with her mother than they are by national patriotism. To emphasize the passage quoted earlier:

Malheureusement, après mon arrivée à Paris, ma mère est morte. Elle représentait le seul élément très important qui me rattachait à la Guadeloupe. Elle partie, la Guadeloupe n'a pas beaucoup compté. (17)

Unfortunately, my mother died after I went to stay in Paris. She was my only significant link to Guadeloupe. Once she was gone, Guadeloupe didn't matter to me very much. (7)

She suggests that Antillean identity embrace a nomadic element as it is already characterized by pluralities of being. It isn't necessarily the act of patching holes in history with forgotten memory. It is the act of fluid movement, of constant remembrance, and a sinuous state of historical reclamation.

Recovering Memory

The departmentalization by the French National Assembly of the French colonies of Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyane, and Réunion initiated troves of new citizens into the projected truths of “Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité” that supposedly govern the French nation. With the goal of consolidation of rights and equal protections, the departmentalization of the French colonies also acted to consolidate the pluralities of Antillean identity.

Maryse Condé has embraced theologies of Antillean theorists like Glissant, Césaire, and Fanon but has also made her own contribution to the conversation surrounding the construction of Antillean identity. Her literature brings life to the autonomous subject and her recreation of individual experience comments on collective history. Like her fiction, Condé's memoir *Le cœur à rire et à pleurer* uses

individual experience and an exploration of interiority to inform universal history. For Condé, identity is rooted in neither space nor time. In fact, it isn't really rooted at all. Place and time are intertwined and both are implicated in the conversation. Condé's writing itself is able to locate the individual in the larger rhetoric of Antillean experience. Condé's writing connects to the idea that "culture is not a static relation of possession but, rather, a perpetually unfolding process of memory and relational existence" (Gallagher xix).

Maryse Condé writes of a collective Antillean heart that laughs and cries; *Le cœur à rire et à pleurer*. Her narrative conflates personal experience with collective memory. She elegantly and subtly uses the act of remembrance to recover lost and manipulated historical experience while posing questions concerning alienation, migration, motherhood, language and transnational identity. Alienation is a possibility no matter the space and persists across national boundaries. Quoting Proust at the beginning of the memoir and ending with a proclamation of movement towards the future, Maryse writes the past into the present and orients her reader towards the possibility of even deeper future revelations.

« Ce que l'intelligence nous rend sous le nom de passé n'est pas lui. »

Of Blue-eyed Blind Men and Blue Sky Cityscapes: Authorial Agency and Diaspora in *Trois femmes à Manhattan*

-Est-ce que tu m'as entendue ? Est-ce que tu m'écoutes ? Condé poses this question as the first line of dialogue in her nouvelle *Trois femmes à Manhattan*. “Did you hear me? Are you listening to me?” Comprehension, both linguistic and cultural, is a central point of departure in *Trois femmes à Manhattan*. The three women who populate Condé’s nouvelle engage in a narrative that elegantly evokes questions of identity through language, race, origin, migration, and gender. The transnational narrative unifies multiple representations of the Black Diaspora in New York City; three female writers converge, their voices layered in the intricacies of their own understandings of what exactly it means to *write*.

Trois femmes à Manhattan accomplishes many of the same triumphs present in Maryse Condé’s longer novels and essays. The piece speaks candidly. It makes clear and forthright assertions regarding the meaning of female authorship in the Black Diaspora and the many variations and forms that that authorship has come to

embody. Placing the three women in Manhattan, Condé artfully constructs a view of New York City through the specificity of her characters' gazes, elucidating class differences within the Black community in New York. Written in the early 1980s, the story gestures towards real historical figures and social movements that help contextualize the then contemporary social reality for Blacks in America. Although the entire *nouvelle* is set in Manhattan, Condé still manages to construct images of Paris, Haiti, and Guadeloupe despite the characters' geographic separation from those localities.

Condé ties her own personal experiences into the *nouvelle* but the piece achieves a broader commentary on the experience of multiple population groups converging in the city of Manhattan. As Condé constructs her narrative on the malleable base of her own experience, she does exactly what the characters in her *nouvelle* attempt to do. The piece attests to the struggles of three female characters who grapple with the complexities of articulating their own gendered subjectivity in a world where patriarchal discourse dominates literary production. Emphasizing the deep implications of Black female authorship, *Trois femmes à Manhattan* simultaneously comments on race, class, immigration, origin, and gender. Condé's narrative reflects the work of theorists such as Édouard Glissant, but it departs from theoretical molds and succeeds in subverting the Western literary canon .

Trois femmes à Manhattan [Three Women in Manhattan] tells the story of three Black women whose lives, although distinct in their own separate realities, converge. Each character claims her own origin, has her own relationship with both foreign and

maternal language⁶, and carries her own distinct articulation of what it means to write. Although each woman comprehends the diasporic experience differently, the three come together as multiple elements of the Black Diaspora converge in the American city of Manhattan. Voices intertwined, Claude, Élinor, and Véra challenge the male dominated literary model and articulate female subjectivity. Condé shifts the female from object to subject, giving voice to these three distinct articulations of the Black Diaspora.

Oriented within vivid descriptions of multiple New York City neighborhoods, the three Black women of *Trois femmes à Manhattan* each attempt to tell their own story. The eldest, Véra, is an unpublished writer who, after emigrating from Haiti to Manhattan, has never enjoyed public literary success or acknowledgment. Élinor, a Black writer born in America, is an established author who enjoys much of the literary success that has been denied Véra. Claude, the central character who links the other two, is a young Guadeloupian woman who wants desperately to be a writer but has yet to really dare. Claude is a housekeeper for both Élinor and Véra. She straddles the two women, volleying between their polar realms but ultimately embodies the link between two women who lead separate lives, but are still united within the Black Diaspora.

Maryse's Véra: Combining Personal History with Collective Experience

In her interview with Françoise Pfaff, Condé speaks about her own personal experience and why she dedicates the story to Véra. Using real encounters as the basis

⁶ I use the term “maternal” to refer to the language that each woman grew up speaking in the nations where they were born.

for her narrative, Véra's character is based on an elderly Haitian woman who Condé met in New York City as her literary career began to take flight. Just as it happens in the story, Condé had the opportunity to listen to "Véra's" unpublished manuscripts. As for the third character, she materialized naturally from the interaction between the other two who were already rooted in Condé's own personal experience: "J'ai ensuite imaginé une troisième femme, Élinor, un écrivain confirmé. En fait, la nouvelle s'est formée toute seule dans ma tête" (Pfaff, "Entretiens" 148) [Then I devised a third woman, Élinor, an established writer. In fact, the story took shape by itself in my head (Pfaff, "Conversations" 102)].

Condé's narrative successfully integrates her own lived experience as an author, the fictitious reality of other Black female authors, and the broader collective experience of women throughout the Black Diaspora together in the text. We understand both Maryse Condé's lived experience as well as Claude's own reality, grounded in memory but already departed into the realms of fiction. While commenting on Antillean identity and also the role of Black women writers in the transnational intersecting neighborhoods of New York City, the reader benefits from broad diasporic generalizations as well as the individuality of the specific characters. Claude passes a Puerto Rican fruit stand on her walk to Véra's; a simple act that adds color to our understanding of Claude's daily life while simultaneously referencing an immigrant population that informs the demographics of the entire city. Condé only partially embraces what she has outlined to be one of the major components of Glissant's model for new writers: "Characters should not be individuals, but the collective expression of the West Indian soul [they should] speak collectively" (Condé *Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer* 128).

Although *Trois femmes à Manhattan* succeeds in elucidating pieces of a larger collective identity, especially as a transnational narrative that unifies multiple feminine voices, each character retains a high level of individuality. Conde introduces broad themes of motherhood, migration, language, and race, all elements of a collective experience, but the contact between the reader and the fictitious individual remains present and strong. In this sense *Trois femmes à Manhattan* propels the very core of the Antillean narrative produced by a feminine voice forward into new literary territory. It embraces collective struggle while still permitting for spontaneity and errantry, never fully choosing between the individual and the universal. Condé embraces established theory in her writing but refuses to adhere to the entirety of its limitations. The reader, for instance, encounters biological mothers but is also faced with questions regarding mother language and national mother origins. These threads operate simultaneously and speak in parallel voices throughout the narrative.

Three Women, Three Mothers

The figure of the mother is ubiquitous in *Trois femmes à Manhattan* and is contextualized through many lenses. She is the mother Africa, claiming to hold the end of the root of the global Diaspora. She is the colonial mother France, beckoning the Antillean subject towards a white criterion of being. She is the colonial daughter turned mother nation Guadeloupe and mother nation Haiti. She is the biological mother. She is the godmother. She is the mentor female author in Élinor. She is the mentor in Véra. She embodies multiple generations. Claude and Véra find themselves

oriented within New York City, a space they are able to inhabit only after significant acts of displacement to and from different mothers.

The direct voices of each character's biological mothers are absent in the piece. However, this absence serves to strengthen their significance rather than diminish it. We hear only from Claude, Élinor, and Véra, and although it is unclear whether or not Élinor's mother is alive or living in the city, one can at least imply that Véra and Claude are geographically distant from their biological parents. The women operate in spaces that they themselves have carved. The trend of increasing global connection and contact in the Antillean subject's post-colonial social reality makes it possible for Claude and Véra to be writers living not in Haiti or in Guadeloupe, not in Paris or Marseilles, but in New York. American Black Nationalism is influenced by the multiplicity of the Black immigrant voice.

Just as Guadeloupe made the transition from a period of colonial subservience to a new period of postcolonial restructuring, so must Claude transition from life with her biological mother to life with a "godmother," and ultimately to a life removed from her mother nation of "origin." And again, characteristically of Condé's writing, the very definition of "origin" is fluid, never fixed. The origin of Claude's identity is tethered neither solely to her biological mother, nor to the godmother who oversaw her early childhood, nor to the place where she was conceived and born.

À dix-neuf ans, son passé lui semblait interminable, confus, semé de douloureux repères, déjà marqué par l'échec. Elle n'avait jamais connu son père, un Marie-Galantais, disparu après sa triste et féconde union avec Alicia, sa mère. Déjà accablée d'enfants, celle-ci l'avait confiée à sa marraine, Mme Bertille Dupré, d'une excellente famille de Pointe-à-Pitre qui lui avait donné la meilleure éducation en échange de travaux ménagers. En fait, elle n'en sortait pas, des travaux ménagers : laver,

frotter, repasser, arroser les plantes...D'un côté de l'Océan comme de l'autre. (185)

To her at nineteen, her past seemed endless, confused, strewn with painful points of reference, already marked by failure. She had never known her father, a native of Marie Galante who disappeared after his sad and fruitful union with Alicia, her mother. Already overburdened with children, her mother placed her in the hands of her godmother, Mrs. Bertille Dupré, of an excellent Point-à-Pitre family, who gave her the best education in exchange for domestic work. Actually, she never got ahead of the domestic chores: wash, scrub, iron, water the plants...on one side of the ocean as on the other. (57)

Claude comes into to contact with similar hierarchical relations working as a housekeeper for both Élinor and Véra. The reader receives this brief, and systematically direct family history through Claude's own personal stream of consciousness. But immediately, Condé snaps the reader back into the present tense of the narrative, moving from Guadeloupe to the dirty dishes waiting to be tended in Élinor's New York apartment.

Claude receives an education under Mme Dupré but at a cost. She is made subservient while receiving the benefits of living under Mme Dupré's care. She is not simply receiving the loving aid of a mother, willing to teach and to guide unconditionally. She receives conditional aid that forces her to occupy a subordinate role, a role she resumes in Manhattan. This relationship of simultaneous aid and subordination between Claude and Mme Dupré clearly mirrors the colonial relationship between France and Guadeloupe. In stark contrast to Haiti, a nation no longer politically tied to the French mother, Guadeloupe's status as *Département d'Outre-*

Mer provides for a national identity that is inescapably relational and, as Glissant would argue, based on associative principles.

...the French West Indian is persuaded of his impotence and encouraged to believe in this disinterested generosity of France, to pursue the privilege of citizenship and the material benefits of departmental status...In the Caribbean Departments, life is dominated by the Social Security building and the airport. The choice can often be dependency or escape. The French Caribbean predicament lies in this collective abdication of identity and the inescapable degradation of folk culture, Creole language, and any sense of being Caribbean.
(Glissant and Dash xviii)

In her narrative, Condé subverts this degradation of “folk culture” by incorporating the transference of oral tradition. Listening to the Véra’s manuscripts, Claude absorbs her Véra’s authorial voice by listening to her. Condé acknowledges the legacy of an oral folk tradition in the Caribbean, a tradition specifically facilitated by women.

Although some might argue that the status of Guadeloupe and Martinique as official French overseas departments has provided for their “privileged” status among other Caribbean nations, France continues to ensure that the Antillean social reality is marked by dependence. The “French Caribbean predicament” conceptualized by Glissant and articulated by J. Michael Dash in his introduction to the English translation of *Le discours antillais* cannot be overlooked. Claude too receives “aid” from a mother figure in exchange for her subservience. Ultimately however she “dislocates herself,” a reaction to the alienating effects of Departmentalization (Dash, CD xix). Claude is anything but passive. She asserts her own agency by moving to America, refusing Paris, and gathering within herself the audacity needed to become a writer.

The third-person narration draws direct attention to the shared realities of Claude and Élinor while simultaneously highlighting key differences. Their shared secret revolves around an understanding: “Claude était une Élinor que le destin, enchanteur distrait, avait oublié de combler après l’avoir arrachée au néant” (186) [Claude was an Elinor that the absent-minded sorcerer, destiny, had forgotten to gratify after having wrenched her from nothingness (58)]. Élinor shares details, “under the pretext of perfecting her French,” with Claude about her childhood spent growing up as one of seven in a Victorian house inherited on her mother’s side. Claude envisions clear parallels between Élinor’s mother and her own Mme Bertille Dupré as well as the “absent but forever present” fathers. It was “the same world,” *le même univers, grossi à l’échelle d’un continent*, “blown up to the proportions of a continent” (59). Claude makes the point, however, to cut the comparison where the two women’s childhoods most starkly diverge. Élinor was loved and praised as a child and was spared the fate of being “turned ugly by indifference” (59).

Writing Migration

The third character whose specific fictional identity speaks to a larger identity within the Black Diaspora is Véra, the older Haitian woman from whom Claude draws the bulk of her inspiration. Véra is related to former presidents on both her father’s and her mother’s side; her family had their land confiscated and were sentenced to death under the new Haitian dictator. Véra was spared as she was in Europe pursuing a career as a pianist and a writer. Fueled by the massacre of her family, Véra devoted herself to political activism in Haiti despite failing to physically

return to her nation of origin. Véra remains preoccupied with Haiti: “Elle qui n’avait pas vu Haïti depuis vingt ans, savait tout ce qui s’y passait, analysait tout ce qui s’y disait. L’île était en elle comme un poto-mitan sous-tendant sa vie” (190) [For someone who hadn’t see Haiti for twenty years, she knew everything that happened and analyzed everything people said there. The island was within her like a *poto-mitan*, the central pillar supporting her life (61)].

Although both Claude and Véra immigrate to the United States from nations shaped by colonialism in the Black Diaspora, Condé creates a stark division between the two women. The first independent nation in Latin America, Haiti is also marked by its history as a republic governed by Black leaders after a successful slave rebellion in 1804. Véra’s relationship with the nation of her birth does not follow the same trajectory as Claude’s. The mother figure is not congruently structured in the hearts and minds of Véra and Claude, but this does not diminish depth of their connection rooted in language, in Blackness, in the feminine, and in the ultimate multiplicity inherent in Antillean identity.

Both Claude and Véra distance themselves from their mother nations of origin and, through that act of migration, are able to articulate their own female subjectivity. Condé creates the space necessary for this articulation by dismantling the binary oppositions of the reigning patriarchal order that was built on the exclusion of female subjectivity. Through the specificity of her characters’ voices and through her own act of literary production as a Guadeloupean female author, Condé generates space that permits for a new kind of minority discourse. By creating distance from the biological mother and the French motherland, Condé opens the Antillean female to an alternative Black diasporic experience in the United States.

This distance, made possible by the act of migration, greatly informs the ways in which maternal figures shape Véra, Élinor, and Claude. Although each character's personal experience is distinct, all three women have participated in acts of personal distancing. In this sense, Condé emphasizes the communal focus present in Antillean literary discourse while simultaneously drawing attention to the specificity of individual experience, refusing to constrict her narrative exclusively to a universal subconscious. Claude and Véra effectively reconfigure colonial cartographies and patriarchal mappings by engaging in acts of migration that permit them to open up into a third space, one that is separate from their countries of birth, the colonial mother France, and the overarching mother image of Africa.

By emphasizing migration, Condé explicates her understanding of Antillean identity. She acknowledges the significance of the fluidity of movement and its power to inform a displacement that generates its own set of lateral roots. The mother is emphasized in the space of her absence. The lack of the mother's direct voice in the narrative draws the reader's attention to her indelible significance. The characters depart from biological as well as metaphysical mother figures. These acts of departure permit for the reconstruction of self and identity. Ties to the motherland are not severed, but instead are reconstructed so that identity can be shaped in a space in which boundaries are challenged out of their fixed states of rigidity and become malleable so that a true understanding of multiplicity can occur.

Condé proposes a new mother construct, one that is not confined to the stereotypes surrounding Black motherhood advanced within the West's authoritarian system of knowledge and the populace of its literary canon. Western colonial efforts at expansion included placing the Antilles into a restrictive interpretation of gender. The

Western discourse sexualized and imagined the Antilles as a subordinate woman waiting to be conquered by Western dominance. This discourse also rendered the Antilles genderless as both men and women subjects were confined to the category of the Other, subaltern without gender. In terms of literary representations, Black women were forced into various roles from the sexualized Jezebel, to the exclusively maternal Mammy. In *Trois femmes à Manhattan* Maryse Condé marks three individual mothers and releases them from the mammy stereotype.

Black women have developed their own discourse on Black motherhood, a motherhood that is often defined in opposition to White motherhood, implying a different set of historical realities (Ippolito 58). The “mammy” figure, selfless and self-sacrificing, has been negatively embedded in the West’s imagination. Maryse Condé challenges this model by deliberately constructing mother figures who are layered and complex characters even though they do not speak directly in *Trois femmes à Manhattan*. The emotional effects these mothers have on their respective children are not one-dimensional. The identity of each woman is in part defined by her relationship to her mother. The mothers are physically absent from the narrative, highlighting the significance of each of their daughter’s own paths of migration.

Motherhood is a central trope in Condé’s reconstruction of the Black female, one that challenges both the stereotypes and the voicelessness concerning the Black female in the established Western canon. Condé’s commentary concerning motherhood and the mother construct is implicit in both the interpersonal relationships between characters and the relationships between characters and specific nations. Claude and Vera’s physical departures from their birth nations embody the poetics of dispersal and dislocation articulated by Glissant. Condé engages with

Glissant as her characters are not necessarily in the business of rejecting space.⁷ In line with Glissant's theory, the three women in *Trois femmes à Manhattan* use migration as a way to synthesize space. Each character operates within a cross-cultural imagination, one that utilizes locations of origin and residence as points of reference rather than exclusive informants of identity.

With new interpretations and reconstructions of motherhood as well as connection and displacement to and from physical and geographic mothers, it makes sense that contact is at the heart of Condé's metaphor. Contact between languages, between places, between immigrants, and between literary works forms an important element of *Trois femmes à Manhattan*. Condé stresses the importance of the creative process as she outlines the development of Claude's identity as a Black woman writer. The creative imagination moves beyond geographic limitations, free to dream of other lands and other mothers (Condé *Order Disorder* 130). Increased contact with the world invigorates the creative voice that articulates an identity that is not constrained by national boundaries.

Zora's Diaspora

Trois femmes à Manhattan illustrates the unification of the Black Diaspora in the Americas. The three main characters that are voiced in *Trois femmes à Manhattan* experience individual realities informed by acts of immigration and the subsequent process of cultural synthesis but they are also part of a larger environment that is

⁷Cladue does actively reject the idea of moving to Paris however this act of geographic rejection speaks more to her assertion of agency than to a spatial rejection that limits the development of a transnational identity.

marked by larger phenomena of immigration and cultural synthesis. Condé situates her narrative in the framework of New York City, a city indelibly defined by its immigrant populations. The New York City depicted in *Trois femmes à Manhattan* is multifaceted, the urban embodiment of the multiplicity inherent in Black Diasporic identity. The variety of nations represented in the New York City neighborhoods contributes to the multiplicity of voices present in the narrative. All three women have experienced suffering due to living as Black women in the world. The ties that link Élinor, Claude and Véra in New York emphasize the existence and the importance of the link between different members of the Black Diaspora in the Americas.

Images of 1985 New York City shift throughout the narrative. The reader's view of the city changes as the characters' perceptions of the city change. Condé asserts her own commentary on the complexity of the urban New York City reality through the changing perceptions of her characters. She frames the city in contrasting ways, prompting the reader to ask why there is such a marked transition in the representation of the city throughout the *nouvelle*. Hidden realities reveal themselves as the narrative propels itself forward; unifying voices of the Black Diaspora and presenting snapshots of 1985 New York that are informed by the female authorial voice.

The reader experiences the first glimpse of New York City as Claude gazes through the kitchen window in Élinor's swanky new apartment. The image comes directly after Condé describes Claude's attempt to read one of Élinor's novels. Claude's limited knowledge of the English language prevents her from reading it so instead she reads the patterns, the "intertwining signs- which for her meant nothing"

(57). Claude stares at the patterns made by English words in Élinor's book just as she regards the patterns of the New York City skyline through Élinor's window.

Par la fenêtre de la cuisine, Claude apercevait un vrai décor de carte postale. Sous un ciel bleu vif, les gratte-ciel étincelants enserrant les rues perpendiculaires, parcourues de taxis jaunes. Que New York est surprenant ! Claude ne s'était pas encore habituée à cette beauté déconcertante comme celle d'un visage dont on n'a jamais rêvé. (184)

Through the kitchen window, Claude had a picture postcard view: under a bright blue sky, the sparkling skyscrapers holding in the perpendicular streets filled with yellow taxis. How surprising New York Is! Claude had not yet become used to this beauty, which was as disconcerting as that of a face of which no one has ever dreamed. (57)

Claude's inability to understand the English words in Élinor's novel parallels her fascination with the New York City view that she sees through Élinor's window.

Perspectives of the city change. Élinor is the fresh, young, and successfully published author and her kitchen window presents Claude with a "picture postcard view," a fantasy view similar to the one projected globally that lures so many immigrants to the city. Claude describes her own New York City neighborhood as "dump," where Blacks and Puerto Ricans are "united by the same misery" (57). Claude wonders what elements of her childhood led her to depart from her "nonchalant island" for a city "where everything spoke of success, fortune" (57). Her physical departure from the island of Guadeloupe separates her from a past that "seemed endless, confused, strewn with painful points of reference, already marked by failure" (57). Claude participates in an act of physical displacement, orienting her own identity within the larger theoretical framework of poetic dispersal and displacement.

“Pourquoi pas Paris...?” “Why not Paris,” Claude confronts this question as she begins her first day of work in Élinor’s apartment. Élinor stumbles in French that is “both faltering and precise,” overwhelming Claude with questions about Guadeloupe and why she chose to leave. For Claude, the answer is clear, starkly articulated in her mind. Paris is a false dream for Claude, a city painted for her by the musings of Mme Bertille’s friends who returned from lavish vacations in Paris with story upon story dripping in rosy excitement. The lure of the mother France fails to seduce Claude. She views Paris as an “overpraised harlot” a “catin trop vantée” and pledges to “set sail for another America” (58).

But this “autre Amérique” has many views through many windows. Claude’s rejection of the Parisian metropolis makes a significant statement. Claude embraces her agency, separates herself from her biological mother and her country of birth, rejects the colonial mother France, and chooses to live in a city that unites multiple voices of the Black Diaspora. The specificity of New York City presents a new space for the Antillean female discourse. It re-orientes and re-constructs the home, and establishes a series of transnational roots that are as fluid and mobile as the plurality of the female voice. Claude and Véra represent immigrant communities that challenge our conventional perceptions of national boundaries and also our understanding of a national identity defined by multiplicity (Barbour 15).

Claude’s movement through New York’s urban metropolis shifts the readers view and presents multiple immigrant populations.

Au sortir de chez Élinor, Claude se rendait par l’autobus chez Véra, quatre-vingt-diex rues plus haut en plein cœur de Harlem. Là, plus de portier en uniforme bleu ciel à galons, plus de gardien de la sécurité en

uniforme bleu sombre à tlakie walkie, plus de tapis d'Orient, de plantes vertes, d'ascenseur vous emportant d'un souffle jusqu'au vingt-cinquième étage...Hélas, Harlem n'était plus la capitale des arts et du plaisir où Zora Neale Hurston dansait le charleston en montrant ses chevilles. C'était un ghetto, sale, désespéré où la majorité des familles subsistait grâce aux coupons alimentaires. (188)

When she left Elinor's, Claude took the bus to Vera's, ninety streets uptown in the heart of Harlem. Here, there was no doorman in a sky-blue uniform with chevrons, no more security guard in a dark blue uniform and walkie-talkie, no more Oriental rugs, green plants, elevator taking you up to the 25th floor in one breath...Alas, Harlem was no longer the capital of arts and pleasure where Zora Neale Hurston would show off her ankles dancing a Charleston. It was a dirty, desperate ghetto where most of the families survived thanks to food stamps. (60)

Claude recognizes that fifteen years earlier, Véra's apartment building had been full of doctors and Wall Street employees but that the flood of movement towards the suburbs had left Harlem in a state of desperation, no longer basking in the glow of renaissance or Hurston's words. Condé comments on the social reality of 1985 Harlem, alludes to economic and political shifts in the neighborhood, represents Vera as a "last relic of the past," fixed in the former glory of Harlem.

Condé enriches her contemporary narrative with historical figures. Condé shares Vèvè Clark's concern with "Diaspora literacy" and deliberately weaves names of historical and cultural figures whom she argues "we, the people of the Black Diaspora, should know and recognize" and all readers need to encounter in order to fully understand the text (Barbour 15). Condé's insertions of historical figures in the text are not mere citations. Her narrative demands that the reader travel into a deeper knowledge of the historical, social, economic, and political textures of the time

and space in which she writes. Perhaps Condé is speaking most directly to a Black Antillean female readership but her narratives also have the power to inform individuals within the white Western literary establishment that she subverts. Condé states:

Certainement. J'écris pour moi-même mais j'écris aussi toujours pour provoquer les gens, pour les obliger à accepter des choses qu'ils n'ont pas envie d'accepter, à regarder des choses qu'ils n'ont pas envie de regarder. Je crois que c'est cela qui domine dans tous mes livres. (Pfaff, "Entretiens" 49)

Certainly. I write for myself but also to provoke people, to force them to accept things they don't want to accept and to see things they don't want to see. I think this need to upset people prevails in all my books. (Pfaff, "Conversations" 30)

The reader is not meant to simply look up a reference, but instead to experience what is *dessous* or "behind" as the term is used by Bernabé in *Eloge de la créolité* (Barbour 15).

Condé's writing comes from distinct lived experiences. Her own personal experience as young female immigrant living in New York City informs Claude's character. Harlem is an important place of reference, a reference that is not limited to its significance in American history. The Harlem renaissance influenced young Antillean students in Paris in the thirties who sought contact with the rest of the world and a new and deep connection with Africa through the work of Harlem Renaissance poets. Movements such as *la négritude* followed this push for contact and diasporic understanding. So as Condé cites Harlem, the Harlem Renaissance, and the prominent figure Zora Neale Hurston, she constructs a context that draws on a depth of history and meaning within the Black Diaspora.

Although Claude has just recently migrated to New York from Guadeloupe, Véra has been in the city for many years. This contrast between the two women speaks to the long history of immigration, specifically Caribbean immigration, which characterizes New York City. For Caribbean women the act of migration meant contact with new terrains that propelled reconstructions of self. Being successful, or “making it” in America shifted women’s identity, as they had to re-orient themselves in new cultural, political, and historical spaces. As notions of “home” change, so does the role of the female in Caribbean nationalist literature, leaving a space where she were never fully included and emphasizing her own absence, an absent presence that is “essential for the black male subject of history” (Saunders 132). It is here that Caliban encounters his mate.

In New York City, Claude encounters an urban reality that has already been greatly affected by Caribbean immigration, especially the mass migration of the 1930s. The shift in demographics across major American cities that occurred because of this mass migration significantly affected America’s urban climate (Saunders 134). As Winston James notes: “from a population of twenty thousand in 1900, the foreign-black population in the United States had grown to almost a hundred thousand by 1930. The overwhelming majority of these migrants came from the Caribbean islands, over 80 percent of them...between 1899 and 1932” (Saunders 134). New York became one of the primary sites of migration for West Indians who were slowly “darkening the landscape of the United States” (Saunders 134).

It is important to consider whether or not Condé’s narrative points to a fragmented or a united immigrant population in New York City. Ultimately, Condé paints the immigrant neighborhood that Claude returns to each day as a complex and

layered environment, distinct from Élinor's alternate universe. Language, race, class, and national origins all act to both alienate and unify various groups and individuals. By orienting her characters in this world of displacement, Condé underlines the plurality of both the identity of the immigrant as well as the plurality implicit in the unification of the Black Diaspora in America.

Claude observes a unity propelled by the shared experience of misery. She observes the silenced voices of the people around her and fiercely questions why Élinor should be able to enjoy so much success while Véra writes with no hope of public acknowledgement. Claude's gaze encapsulates a people united by shared misery.

Claude regardait et que voyait-elle ? Des hommes, des femmes entassés dans des ghettos, humiliés dans leur esprit, blessés dans leur chair. Des hommes, des femmes soumis à la dictature, écartelés aux points cardinaux du monde. (192-193)

Claude would look, and what did she see? Men and women crammed into ghettos, humiliated in their minds, wounded in their flesh. Men and women subjects of dictatorship, wrenched to the cardinal points of the Earth. (64)

Walking home from Élinor's apartment, Claude sees Puerto Rican street vendors selling mangos and plantains and feels only a "nauseous bitterness" at the sight of merchandise that speak of "the climate where misery at least can be clothed in rags of the sun" (66).

Language both alienates and unites within the narrative of *Trois femmes à Manhattan*. The linguistic tide works its way through *Trois femmes à Manhattan*, weaving its own connecting thread to synthesize Condé's commentary on cultural

comprehension and understanding, voice and agency, alienation and assimilation, and the redemptive practice of writing. Each of the three women in *Trois femmes à Manhattan* experience language differently, utilize it differently, and come to different conclusions of comprehension. Language is central to the narrative, and is the central emphasis of both the beginning and the end of the nouvelle.

“*Est-ce que tu m’as entendue? Est-ce que tu m’écoutes?*” “Did you hear me? Are you listening to me?” Élinor speaks to Claude, listing off the same set of instructions each morning before leaving the apartment. Claude chooses not to listen because she can predict Élinor’s words. But just as Élinor stumbles over French words while interviewing Claude for the position during their first meeting, Claude has trouble with the English that Élinor has made her profession. Claude can’t read Élinor’s novel.

Elle avait bien offert son roman à Claude, mais sa connaissance limitée de l’anglais ne lui avait pas permis de le lire. Elle s’était bornée à l’ouvrir, caressant des yeux l’entrelacs de signes qui pour elle ne signifiaient rien, avant de le ranger sur l’unique étagère de sa chambre entre son album de photos et un exemplaire de *Teach yourself English*.
(184)

She had in fact given a copy of her novel to Claude but her limited knowledge of English had prevented her from reading it. She did nothing more than open it up, looking fondly at the intertwining signs- which for her meant nothing- before placing it on the only shelf in her bedroom between her photo album and a copy of *Teach Yourself English*.
(57)

It is quite blatantly ironic that Claude discards the novel next to a copy of *Teach Yourself English*. The words intertwine but they are meaningless for Claude. She is an alien in the world of Élinor's craft.

Just as the incomprehensible English language distances Claude from Élinor, common language unites her with Vera.

Quand elle avait rencontré Claude, celle-ci n'avait pas mangé depuis deux jours et voyait le monde à travers un brouillard laiteux qui le rendait plus beau. Le lieu était largement ouvert, chose rare à New York, alors, elle y était entrée. Là, ô surprise, on parlait français. Des fillettes aux joues couleur cannelle faisaient circuler de grands plateaux d'orangeade et de pâtés. Était-ce enfin Dieu qui se manifestait ? Si l'on veut, car à ce moment, Claude avait rencontré le regard de Vera.

When Claude had met Vera, the latter hadn't eaten for two days and was looking at the world through a milky fog which made it more beautiful. She had been walking down Amsterdam Avenue when she stumbled on a meeting room that was wide open, so rare in New York, that she had gone in. There-oh, surprise- people were speaking in French. Little girls with cinnamon-colored cheeks were passing around large platters of orangeade and pâtés. Had the face of God finally appeared? You could say so because, at that moment, Claude's gaze had met that of Vera.

The sounds of French bring the two women together and from that moment on they are united. Language establishes shared acts of identity and alienation. Claude is inspired by the work Véra has produced but enraged at her misfortune.

Véra reads to Claude. She reads manuscripts of her novels- all unpublished and all returned from editors from France, Belgium, Switzerland, and Canada. Claude basks in Véra's voice, listening to her words in French, hanging from her lips and trying to uncover even the slightest fault hidden in the work because she cannot

understand why Véra's words must go to die while Élinor's are so celebrated. She questions notions of beauty and is unable to reconcile why the beauty of Véra's texts has been alienated and marginalized.

The fact that Véra reads aloud to Claude also gestures towards an oral history that is fundamental in the Caribbean tradition. Passing stories orally is an important element in the Caribbean literary tradition and the long hours that Véra spends reading aloud to Claude unite them in that aspect of their collective history. The Caribbean oral tradition, especially as it pertains to the transference of folklore, is a gendered tradition facilitated by Caribbean women. It is the unpublished manuscript that inspires Claude and not the Black American celebrity's narrative. The written style is associated with Élinor while the oral style is associated with Véra.

Claude listens to the unpublished manuscripts, filled with French words that form a voice that has gone unappreciated, fascinated as they travel to her from the page through Véra's lips. Condé emphasizes the act of reading aloud. She underlines the importance of transmitting narratives orally. To Claude, these oral transactions constitute the "most precious moment." The act of listening as well as the simple comprehension of Véra's work is deeply treasured. Condé comments on the tragedy of Véra's unsuccessful career while simultaneously highlighting the importance of oral tradition. In this Condé's work echoes Glissant's argument regarding the importance of preserving the oral tradition.

It is not a matter of claiming that writing is of no use to us, and we are aware of the dramatic need for literacy and the circulation of books in our countries. For us, it is a matter of ultimately reconciling the values of the culture of writing and the long-repressed traditions of orality. In the past, in the darkness of slavery, speech was forbidden, singing was

forbidden, but also learning to read was punishable by death. (Glissant and Dash 249)

Véra writes of Haiti, “*The Battle of Vertières: A Historical Novel; A Haitian Woman’s Heart; Angélita Reyes.*” Claude connects to history through Véra’s powerful narratives, articulated through a strong feminine voice and transmitted to Claude orally in French.

Although Claude is initially alienated from Élinor by the English language she cannot read in her novels, Claude’s relationship to English changes throughout the course of the nouvelle. She attends English classes at City College where she learns English during her time free in the evenings.

Elle y apprenait l’anglais. Peu à peu, la parole de New York qui l’avait effrayée, assourdie, devenait intelligible. Les rébus des enseignes au néon, des affiches...se laissaient déchiffrer. Au coin de la 140 Rue, un vieil homme blotti sous un porche leva vers elle ses yeux bleutés de cécité. Elle lui tendit un de ses derniers quarts de dollar. (193)

She was learning English. Bit by bit, the sounds of New York- which had frightened and deafened her- were becoming intelligible. She was able to decipher the puzzles of neon signs and posters...At the corner of 140th Street, an old man huddled up under a porch looked up at her with his bluish, blind eyes. She offered him one of her last quarters. (64)

This slow unveiling of the English language to Claude parallels Claude’s absorption into New York City: “She was beginning to carry her own weight as a living person of the neighborhood” (63). The specificity of the street corner orients the reader within Claude’s world: these familiar spaces, the individuals she encounters in her neighborhood.

Condé's narrative can also be read as an exercise that restructures power and agency as it has been imagined by the West. Claude learns the English of the colonizer, and it is she who donates her last quarter to the blue-eyed man. He receives the potentially "patronizing" act of charity. This encounter elucidates an incredibly significant set of role reversals. It is here that Condé subverts established canons and binaries. Traditional assumptions of white superiority as well as male superiority are challenged when it is Claude who bestows an act of charity on the blue-eyed man. Notions of colonial encounters and the Guadeloupe's sociopolitical dependence on France are evoked by this elegantly concise encounter within the narrative. Later in the *nouvelle* Claude crosses by the same corner at 140th Street and observes how the cold has chased the old man from his doorway. The white male presence is weak, blind, and eventually nonexistent.

Claude's shifting relationship with the English language in *Trois femmes à Manhattan* elucidates Glissant's argument concerning cultural Creolization and the cross-cultural and trans-national relationships that inform the plurality of Antillean identity. Multilingualism is the inevitable consequence of contact, a contact so strongly emphasized in this narrative by Maryse Condé.

What is multilingualism? It is not only the ability to speak several languages, which is often not the case in our region where we sometimes cannot even speak our oppressed mother tongue. Multilingualism is the passionate desire to accept and understand our neighbor's language and to confront the massive leveling force of language continuously imposed by the West- yesterday with French, today with American English- with a multiplicity of languages and their mutual comprehension. (Glissant and Dash 249)

This multilingualism, as Glissant argues, is not part of some “vague humanism” but rather grounds for establishing egalitarian cross-cultural relationships between histories that are indisputably interrelated (Glissant and Dash 249).

Claude directly catalyses the connection between the three women in *Trois femmes à Manhattan*. She is the bond between them, the point of contact that orients each of their lives in the context of the other two. The narrative depicts three separate female writers because, as Maryse Condé stated, “En fait cette nouvelle porte sur l’écriture” (149)[This story is, in fact, about writing (102)]. Although Claude’s relationship with Élinor differs from the one she cultivates with Véra, she recognizes that both women have become quite attached to her.

Pourquoi ces deux femmes, chacune à sa manière, l’avaient-elles prise en affection ? À cause de sa jeunesse ? De sa naïveté ? De sa bénignité ? Elle comprenait qu’elle était leur création, qu’elle était le rouleau e papyrus sur lequel elles se dessinaient librement les signes par lesquels elles choisissaient de se représenter. Mais, en même temps, n’étaient-elles pas en son pouvoir ? Un acte de refus et se briserait le miroir dans lequel Élinor se voyait si belle. Un geste de lassitude et Véra ne pourrait plus souffler, épuisée, en bout de course. (192)

Why had these two women, each in her own manner, become attached to her? Because of her youth? Her naïveté? Her kindness? She understood that she was their creation, that she was the papyrus roll upon which they freely drew the signs through which they had chosen to represent themselves. But, by the same token, weren’t they in her power? One act of refusal and the mirror in which Elinor saw herself so beautiful would break. One gesture of weariness and Vera could no longer breathe, exhausted, completely worn out. (63)

The three women writers depicted in the narrative are all at different points of development. This passage can be connected to much of Glissant’s theory outlined

earlier concerning the importance of Self-representation. Claude is the fresh blank slate on which each of the older women paints her own lived history while leaving adequate blank space for what could have been.

Véra becomes obsessed with Élinor after learning that Claude is employed in her household. She follows Élinor in the media, cutting magazine clippings and obsessing over reviews. Véra is unimpressed by the critical acclaim that surrounds Élinor, *White* publications that “culled her references to folklore of the Old South and to collective black patrimony while still emphasizing her beauty, burning like an August night in Georgia” (57). It’s unclear whether it’s Claude or commentary coming from the third-person narrator, but the text explicitly shows Élinor’s success measured by her recognition in *White* journals, because when it comes to Black magazines, “as soon as a black man or a black woman writes a few lines, they’re treated as geniuses!” (57).

Élinor’s success within White literary circles enrages Véra. She asks how Élinor tolerates the buzz that surrounds her. Véra is committed to Haiti, to a serious set of causes, and views Élinor’s work as void of any true meaning or cause. Perhaps this state of frustration is a reflection of Condé’s own experience conveying collective social and political agendas through her fiction. Claude finds Élinor herself in a state of disarray when she enters the apartment one morning and finds Élinor collapsed on the floor, sobbing over a pile of Black magazines, *Black Culture*, *Black Essence*, *Black World*. Élinor shares her exasperation with Claude, crying out in open frustration: “They want me to speak once more about slavery and the slave trade and racism, for me to adorn us with the virtues of victims, and to inspire hope...” (64). Claude is able to see, in this candid instance, Élinor’s own frustrations with the trajectory of her

work. She feels fixed, limited, forced to engage in work that centers on the plight of “her people” and the struggles of “her race.”

While Condé never directly mentions Toni Morrison, a tacit connection may be drawn between Élinor’s character and the author Toni Morrison. Maryse Condé speaks candidly about Toni Morrison in her interviews with Françoise Pfaff. She explains how much she connects with the work of James Baldwin, mainly because she appreciates the “universality” of his work and while she has great respect for Toni Morrison, she still experiences a disconnect when it comes to Morrison and the fact that she feels Morrison writes for “a specifically African-American public.” Condé has great respect for Morrison but she remains critical.

She is undoubtedly a great writer, a remarkable stylist. This may appear a bit critical, but I find her very “politically correct.” Unlike Alice Walker, she doesn’t venture into topics like excision that may displease or irritate people. She doesn’t extol homosexuality as Audre Lorde did. She doesn’t proclaim extremist political convictions like Angela Davis. She is not violent. In my opinion, she doesn’t disturb anybody. She paints her community, the African-American community, with the tested colors magical realism. 136

Some of this same criticism seems voiced in the character of Élinor. Élinor is similarly praised by White critics who indulge in her “references to folklore of the Old South and to collective black patrimony while still emphasizing her beauty, burning like an August night in Georgia.”

Conde crafts an elegant web of relationships between the three women writers that elucidates issues of race, class, gender, and national origin. Even if Élinor is not meant to be Morrison, she is still certainly meant to underline class differences in the narrative as well as issues of gender and race in America. Claude straddles two

worlds, severed by class structures, but united in the Black Diaspora. Ultimately, as Condé states in her interviews with Françoise Pfaff, *Trois femmes à Manhattan* is about three women who wish to write. Claude is the link between Élinor and Véra and holds within her a set of future possibilities that have yet to be explored.

Erzulie Dantor, A Love Story

Trois femmes à Manhattan explores the relationship of the writer to the written word, the discovery of the power that survives fiercely in the assertion of her own voice and her own agency. Writing becomes “an audacious act, one tantamount to an usurpation of the potential for literary creation, which had been previously the sole province of males” (Esteves and Paravisini-Gebert xiii). Claude’s fierce desire to write, to reclaim her lost “audacity to write” permits Condé to comment on the obstacles Black female authors encounter when it comes to asserting their own voices in literary establishments that have historically and systematically oppressed female voices (Esteves and Paravisini-Gebert xiv).

Claude stands between two women who inhabit opposite sides of the literary world. Although a successfully published author, Élinor is divided between Black and White literary establishments. She receives the coos and nods of White critics who indulge in “the folklore of the Old South” and Black critics who want her to write about slavery and the slave trade, with characters that carry the “virtues of victims.” Véra stands opposite Élinor and her unpublished manuscripts “bear witness to the suppression of the voicing of the Haitian historical plight” (ibid.). Claude recognizes

the tragedy of Véra's unpublished manuscripts, a tragedy heightened for Claude by Élinor's celebrated status as an author.

Claude poses the questions that are at the heart of the narrative. She asks questions about beauty, about womanhood, and about what it truly means to be a writer. She questions women's relationships to the literary establishment that she herself wishes to seek access to.

Qui définit le Beau? Qui décide du succès? Pourquoi Élinor marchait-elle en plein soleil? Véra dans sa nuit? L'écriture n'est qu'un piège, le plus cruel de tous, un leurre, une simulation. (191)

Who defines Beauty? Who decides upon success? Why was Elinor basking in the full sun? Vera in her darkness? Writing is but a trap, the cruelest of all, a snare, a sham of communication. (63)

Claude feels the weight of Véra's silenced voice. She feels the weight of Véra's silent, repressed history. Claude, after bearing witness to Élinor's desperation, is ready to bring the news home to Véra. She holds the news of Élinor's despair as a sort of offering, as something to be shared between them.

Claude chooses to unite herself with Véra. She yearns to write, but it is Véra whom she fantasizes as being her reader, not Élinor. Véra's New York is not the picture perfect postcard but Claude recognizes Véra's voice as indispensable. When Claude pictures Véra hearing the news of Élinor's distress, she pictures the two of them becoming even further united. Claude imagines the scene clearly.

En agissant ainsi, Claude n'avait pas l'impression de trahir un secret qu'elle aurait dû garder. Au contraire, elle resserrait le lien qui s'était rompu. En effet, depuis le moment où le navire béni par Dieu et le Roi s'était éloigné de la baie pour l'effroyable traversée, plus rien ne les

avait réunies. Des lieux avaient été assignés à résidence. Des langues les avaient contraintes au mutisme. À présent, l'unité se refaisait. (196)

Acting in this way, Claude wouldn't feel as though she'd betrayed a secret she should have kept. On the contrary, she would tighten the bond which had broken. In fact, since the time when the ship-blessed by God and H.R.H. the King- had withdrawn from the bay for the horrifying crossing, nothing more had brought them together. Places of residence had been assigned to them. Languages had compelled them to silence. Now, unity was being made anew. (66)

Language had compelled them to silence. Language united them. Claude resigns herself to becoming a writer and it is Véra, the source of her inspiration, to whom she dedicates her words.

Claude's resolution to dedicate herself to writing shifts throughout the course of the narrative. Claude observes the "arabesques" in Élinor's novel and thinks back to her days in Pointe-à-Pitre when as a young girl she used to fill spiral notebooks with writing. She describes the force she felt as being "uncontrollable", something she didn't know how to harness. She burned the notebooks upon leaving Guadeloupe. This destructive denouncement of voice is tied to a moment of migration. After living in New York however, Claude is inspired by Véra. She knows that "the audacity would come back to her, that her hips, her sex, her heart would set off in motion once again and that she would give birth to her world" (66). Véra is meant to read Claude's world.

When Claude travels towards Véra's apartment for the last time in the narrative, she is confronted by an ambulance parked outside, and a "dread she'd carried with her daily" materializes. Claude understands that she cannot bring back

Véra's dead family or deliver Haiti but her world cracks when she thinks that she might not even be able to deliver her a story. Claude wants to write Véra not as “an octogenarian in a pitiful wool cardigan” but as “Erzulie Dantor, flaming torch clenched in her fist” (67). Véra is Claude's Erzulie Dantor, her own Black Madonna, the ultimate mother figure. Over the course of the narrative, Véra becomes a mother for Claude. A mother connected to her through language, through writing, through their shared Diasporic experience.

Claude, displaced from her country of origin, the language of her formative years, and her mother, finds her own voice in the strange new territory of New York City. *Trois femmes à Manhattan* synthesizes questions of race, gender, class, and citizenship in a narrative told in a chorus of female voices. Claude's eagerness to write is fueled by her desire to break the barricades that have silenced Véra's Haitian voice (Esteves and Paravisini-Gebert xiv). The three Black female authors push the bounds of their own languages in New York City, while simultaneously exploring the traumatic and liberating potential of this agency. The narrative leaves loose ends untied, scattering hope but also tragedy. In this sense Condé's writing asserts a female subjectivity that transcends standard White male discourse

The narrative concludes in its grace and obscurity. Tree roots shoot up in Claude's path and prevent her from reaching the ambulance. As the ambulance pulls away, she meets a Puerto Rican neighbor. The last line of the nouvelle is in Spanish. It is not in French, it is not in English. We are left with a line in a different language, a line that likely is undecipherable for at least some portion of Condé's readership. The reader is left slightly flummoxed, frustrated at not immediately being able to understand.

Conclusion

“Je bâtis a roches mon langage.”
(I build my language with rocks)
-Glissant, *L'intention poétique*

The first time I read Maryse Condé, I read her words as they had originally been written and published, in her own language. *Le cœur à rire et à pleurer* was given to me by a dear professor who suggested we study the text together in our tutorial. I remember sitting bent over the memoir with a pencil, circling and underlining words on each page so much so that I was left with lead smeared fully across my fingertips and the edges of the pages. I circled words I didn't recognize, unfamiliar expressions. I circled phrases that struck me. I circled phrases that made me stop to take a breath. I knew I had a text within my hands that required space, and time, and mostly breath.

Writing a thesis in English that is centered on work originally published in another language meant an automatic dependence on published translations. I choose

however, to sit with *Le cœur à rire et à pleurer* and *Trois femmes à Manhattan* for a long time before ever touching the English translations. Reading the English translations of these works was like hearing a stranger recount a beloved childhood story. The text was at once comfortably familiar but disconcertingly foreign. Because Condé's work emphasizes the power of language, the vast sociocultural and sociopolitical tensions between French and Creole, and her ultimate resolution to free herself from those restrictive linguistic binaries, navigating English translations that seek to encompass the complexity of her linguistic expression is no simple task.

The narratives of Maryse Condé are themselves translations. Although her work is most commonly classified as being written "in French," the narratives translate the French language because they speak with a voice that is foreign in mainland France, a voice that has never existed there. The work of Maryse Condé is already a translation of language and subsequently a translation of the Western literary canon. Condé translates French and Creole languages into her own language that she then uses to construct her narrative. Further translations have the added challenge of preserving the true essence of the text while maintaining the initial work of translation that Condé accomplished in the original expression.

As Walter Benjamin wrote in *The Task of the Translator*: "The task of the translator consists in finding the intended effect upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original" (qtd. in Philcox 36). The act of translation is a cannibalistic act. The translator must cannibalize the text in order to infuse it with the voice of another music, another language. But perhaps it is the translator who is ultimately cannibalized: "to translate the Caribbean text is doubly cannibalistic since the Caribbean work of fiction is, according to Césaire, Glissant,

Depestre, already a cannibalization of the Western canon” (Philcox qtd. in Barbour 21). The translator him/herself is confronted with a text that springs from a mind and heart and world that he/she is not a part of. In that sense, the translator must undergo an act of translation before translating the text at hand.

Richard Philcox, Maryse Condé’s husband and long time translator, speaks of the challenges of translating Condé’s fiction in his essay *Translating Maryse Condé: A personal Itinerary*.

Translation implies a change, a transformation, but of what and of whom? Not only does the text, the very subject of the translation, undergo a major upheaval, but the translator in person is transformed in the process....As a white, English-speaking male, brought up in the narrow confines of a parochial English family, belonging to a culture used to dominating the world and, at the time, grappling with a fading sense of superiority, I have had to undergo serious translation to confront the worlds of a black, female writer from the French-speaking Caribbean...Loving the English language as I do, I have learned to place it at the service of another culture and force it from its dominant position into a labor of love. (Philcox)

Philcox has been challenged to translate Condé’s creolisms while maintaining the paratextual and linguistic specificity of her text for the English reader.

There is an implicit relationship between the Cannibal and the Caribbean subject’s “Calibanesque Otherness” (Barbour 21). Caliban himself learned English so that he might curse, but as Sarah E. Barbour and Gerise Herndon have argued, “Condé goes beyond quoting the canon or cursing the colonizer; to read Condé is to deepen the complexity of one’s understanding of the multiplicities of Caribbean and African diaspora identity, and of history itself” (Barbour 22). The translator takes his

or her own part in voicing the voiceless and in transporting that voice to a readership that would have otherwise been unable to digest the message of the texts.

As a reader straddling the original and translated narratives of Condé, these challenges inherent in the act of translation surfaced over and over again. Because English is the language in which my mind has developed and the language that houses my written expression, I was able to discover things in the English translations that were hidden from me in the original texts. The sounds, the rhythms, and the movement of Condé's writing in its original form are elements that cannot be duplicated. . I did feel a certain loss however, a certain absence of essence when reading the English versions.

I was also struck by a different sort of translation: the connection I felt to Maryse's translated experience growing up as a Black woman. The text kept me at a distance with a language I was not born speaking but it engulfed me with sensations of an unmistakably specific intimacy. Condé connects with a broad range of readers simply because she is such a fantastic writer but I couldn't help but feel uniquely connected to her through the force of my own Black identity. I felt connected to the Diaspora through her text even though her language is at times still strange in my mouth. This intense feeling of connectivity is, in my opinion, exemplary of Condé's major literary triumphs. Her individual story spoke to me of collective experience.

Just as Condé has transcended linguistic binaries, stepping outside the tumultuous debate on the implications of writing in French or in Creole, she has also moved beyond traditional parameters of literary discourse. In his introduction to Glissant's *Le discours antillais* or *Caribbean Discourse* as his English translation is titled, J. Michael Dash argues that the Caribbean writer is "precariously poised" between

“light and dark, self and other, felt and expressed, hill and plain, and ultimately between solitude and solidarity” (Glissant and Dash xxvi). My argument in this project is that while Condé is certainly presented with similar binaries (as outlined by Dash), her work has carved a new space of transcendence. She does not subscribe to any one theory or classification. She has embraced disorder but has moved toward liberation. She has, to use Sylvia Wynter’s terminology, “disenchanted discourse.”

Le coeur à rire et à pleurer and *Trois femmes à Manhattan* are texts that ring with a collective spirit through the fresh and unique element of personal experience. Condé has produced literature that embodies a new and original theory. Her literature is itself the textual embodiment of theory. Building on established Antillean identity theory and literary criticism, Condé transcends established canons by providing a lens through which the reader can finally decipher the complexities of female subjectivity and the role that gender plays in the Antillean social reality. Her narratives are truly transnational, combining the nomadic migratory experience with shifting notions of origin, race, motherhood, alienation, errantry, class, and gender. Condé’s fiction has constructed a “home in the borderlands.” It has liquefied the root. Condé challenges us to let the dirt of land slip through our fingers while plunging, fearlessly, into the fluid volatility of the sea.

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